

Humanism in the mirror

Piccolomini, Biondo, Facio, Manetti, Cortesi, and Sabellico all have their own distinct voices, and their texts can at times seem quite disparate. Time of composition was one factor. Earlier texts project humanism onto a broader cultural landscape and view its accomplishments within that general context. Piccolomini, for example, portrays humanism alongside law and mendicant preaching as one of the outstanding aspects of a pre-eminent Italian civilization, and Giannozzo Manetti draws connections between the *studia humanitatis* and scholastic university education. By the end of the century, however, Cortesi and Sabellico only mention humanism's cultural competitors in passing, and they leave no doubt that their own pursuit of eloquence constitutes the height of human flourishing. Identification with a certain city or region also led writers to set different priorities. In terms of local color, Piccolomini gives special attention to Siena, Biondo to the Romagna. Manetti's Florentine pride leads him to insist on the humanist credentials of the Three Crowns. Cortesi's affiliation with Rome and Sabellico's with Venice are patent. Finally, an author's personal profile and education also affected his presentation. For example, Paolo Cortesi's commitment to Ciceronianism undoubtedly influenced his portrayal of humanism as the return to Ciceronian Latin. In contrast, Sabellico's more inclusive taste allowed him to appreciate broader trends. For his part, Manetti's connection to the monastic humanism of Santo Spirito and Santa Maria degli Angeli, as well as his own religiosity, led him to depict humanism as a holy pursuit.

Yet it is the continuity rather than the differences between these authors' views that deserves greater attention. For despite dissimilarities in time, place, and personality, their respective visions of humanism are fundamentally congruent. At the most basic level, they show that humanists had developed self-awareness as belonging to a pan-Italian movement not bound to any one city or leader. Instead what held humanists together was a common goal – the restoration of classical Latin eloquence – and a shared

sense of group identity based on a collection of salient characteristics, such as: personal investment in an intellectual and cultural tradition descending from Petrarch, Chrysoloras, Bruni, the manuscript-hunters, and the early humanist educators; a linguistic orientation that put primary emphasis on classical Latin, secondary on Greek, and that in general disregarded the vernacular; the conviction that eloquence had enormous cultural significance; love of antiquity; and the sense of standing at the forefront of a transformative cultural renewal. It would of course be incorrect to apply the humanist self-conception that emerges from six authors to every single Italian humanist of the fifteenth century. The point here is not to develop a strict profile for all “real” or “authentic” humanists, but rather to establish a rubric that accounts for the way humanists tended to view themselves and their enterprise, and that, through its broad application, helps us to understand the nature of humanism better. What follows is a review of the common themes addressed throughout this study and, to the extent permitted by our authors, a synthesis of the self-conception shared by humanists in fifteenth-century Italy.

The essence of humanism

On the whole, when humanists looked into the mirror of their individual or collective soul, what they saw was the striving for Latin eloquence. The only real debate among our authors in this regard – and it was minimal – was over what specific kind of Latin ought to supplant the uncouth, rustic, and barbarous language they believed they had inherited from the Middle Ages. For almost all of them, and for most of the fifteenth century, it was the language of Cicero. The Roman Paolo Cortesi was alone in positing a theory of strict Ciceronian imitation, but others, like Biondo Flavio and Giannozzo Manetti, recognized in Cicero the greatest Latin stylist. For Piccolomini he was the apex of ancient eloquence, a summit by which humanists oriented their own efforts in speaking and in written composition; the highest compliment Piccolomini could give was *simillimus Ciceroni*. Only at the end of the century and in Venice does Marcantonio Sabellico abandon the cult of Cicero and embrace a broader range of authors, still honoring Cicero but preferring Quintilian above him and Livy shortly after.

Giannozzo Manetti dissents to this conception of humanism, but he ultimately shares the vision of the others more than it might initially seem. In his *Trium illustrium poetarum florentinorum vita* he equates the *studia humanitatis* with the *artes liberales*, traditional scholastic philosophy,

theology, and even Paris disputations. Nevertheless, there and in his other biographical works, he also recognizes the revival of classical Latin as a distinct field of endeavor, and he places it at the beginning of a cultural tradition whose other components include the revival of poetry, the hunt for manuscripts containing lost works of literature, the collection of books and the foundation of libraries, and the revival of Greek studies. All of these activities are recognized by all or almost all of our other authors as subsidiary aspects of humanism which aid it in achieving its primary goal of restoring classical Latin. Therefore, although Manetti seems determined to make humanism seem bigger than all this – by turning one of its traditional names, *studia humanitatis*, into an umbrella for the larger intellectual culture of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries – he implicitly recognizes the centrality of classical Latin to the project initiated, as nearly all agree, by Petrarch. Moreover, by acknowledging that his humanist audience does not consider the Three Crowns to be real humanists precisely because of their bad Latin and good vernacular reputation, he puts the central feature of humanism into higher relief.

A secondary but still essential characteristic of humanist self-identity was a general love of antiquity. The primary focus of this love was the language of ancient Rome. It also manifested itself, however, in a broader antiquarianism, as in Facio's and Manetti's Niccoli, who revered not only ancient script and books but also statues and paintings, as well as in Sabellico's Leto and Platina, each one a "great lover of antiquity" (*vetustatis amator egregius*). Nevertheless, as Cortesi's treatment of Dante shows, a love of antiquity without a knowledgeable appreciation for its eloquence was not sufficient. Ultimately, proper Latin was at the heart of antiquity's appeal for humanists and was what endowed the rest of its trappings with meaning.

The success of humanism

Humanists generally possessed great optimism about their own success. The uncertainty we find in Bruni's *Dialogi*, the outright pessimism of Alberti's *De commodis litterarum atque incommodis*, are absent in authors tracing humanism's triumphal history. The least sanguine is Piccolomini, who displays an awareness that the central project of reviving ancient eloquence is far from complete. In his view Bruni, although *simillimus Ciceroni*, suffers from serious defects, such as an inability to speak extemporaneously and poetic dumbness. And even though "in writing" Bruni "exceeded everyone," Piccolomini already looks to a future of better stylists

in Carlo Marsuppini and Francesco Patrizi. His contemporaries Biondo and Manetti are more optimistic in their assessments of humanism's success. For the Florentine Manetti, the *studia humanitatis* had flourished since Dante's time, and Petrarch had restored Latin to its ancient state in one fell swoop thanks to a scholastic education and his "divine genius." Biondo, perhaps strengthening his credentials as a "scientific historian,"¹ more subtly traces good Latin's return along a more complex path of multiple causality (inspiration, teaching, discoveries, books) and historical development, but he, too, believes that the "full flower of Ciceronian eloquence" graces "so many men of our own time." Facio makes no programmatic statement about the state of Latin, but his confidence in the power of his own eloquence indicates a high sense of accomplishment.

It is perhaps inevitable that humanists writing nearly four decades later would look back on the Latin of their forebears as a half-formed creation. Cortesi recognizes the advances made, for example, in the teaching of Guarino and George of Trebizond, or in Valla's lexicographical research, but he denies that authors of their time – explicitly naming Manetti, Facio, and Biondo – enjoyed the full flower of anything. The modern triumph of Cicero required nearly a century of work in recovering the lost *ars* of rhetoric, which alone secured the possibility of the correct imitation of the best model from antiquity. For Cortesi, the beginnings of proper style are to be found in Piccolomini, Campano, Gaza, Platina, Leto, and Pontano, but true perfection was not achieved unless in himself and in his own generation. Sabellico similarly describes the history of humanism as a gradual improvement of Latin style until perfection is achieved in his own time. In his view, however, eloquence was restored with Valla but was only secured permanently towards the end of the Quattrocento, by the subsequent growth of the commentary genre and its mass distribution with the invention of printing.

Excepting Piccolomini, each author posits the restoration of classical Latin in his own time. Manetti thinks that it was *simul et inventum et perfectum* with Petrarch. Biondo, Cortesi, and Sabellico, on the other hand, see perfection as the result of an historical process of development resting largely on humanist teaching (especially the teaching of Greek émigrés) and the progressive recovery of knowledge of the rules of language.

¹ For the refutation of Biondo Flavio's strict status as a "scientific" or "scholarly" rather than a "rhetorical" historian, the product of a school of interpretation founded by Burckhardt and developed by Eduard Fueter, *Geschichte der neueren Historiographie* (Munich, 1911), see Hay, "Flavio Biondo and the Middle Ages," esp. pp. 98–99 and 114–122.

Biondo and Sabellico also emphasize the role of newly recovered ancient literature, particularly the rhetorical works of Cicero and Quintilian, and the restocking of the library of classical antiquity.

The language of humanism

Humanists most consistently called themselves *oratores* and *poetae*.² Our authors use the latter term to refer exclusively to writers of poetry, but the former can point either to prose stylists in particular (as in Facio) or more generally to all humanists (as in Manetti and Sabellico), as their primary characteristic was their concern with and excellence in Latin *oratio*. Cortesi also has this sense in mind when he withholds the title of *oratores* from the humanists, calling them instead *homines docti*, a denomination also used by Facio. The precise force of *homines docti* is unclear in Facio, but for Cortesi it underlines the learning, especially in the *ars* of rhetoric, that humanists needed to amass in order to become true *oratores*. Thus humanists were learned, and learned in a way different from medieval writers and similar to ancient ones, insofar as they knew the rules of speech that were at the root of ancient eloquence.

If their primary occupation was with the Latin language, it is worth asking what the grounds are, beyond custom, of continuing to call these cultivators of eloquence “humanists,” as opposed to introducing a more descriptive appellation like “Latinists” or, following Michael Baxandall, a more contemporary equivalent such as “orators.”³ After all, one can hardly imagine a more efficient way to avoid anachronism, obviate conflation with vague notions of human values or humanitarianism, and relieve scholars of endless discomfort.⁴ Yet there are good reasons for retaining the usage. The most obvious is the interest in terminological continuity. Second, the

² Cf. Billanovich, “Auctorista, humanista, orator,” esp. pp. 160–163. *Litteratus* is another term commonly used by humanists to describe themselves, such as in the title of Pierio Valeriano’s *De litteratorum infelicitate*, but it does not occur in our authors. See also James Hankins, “Humanism, Scholasticism, and Renaissance Philosophy,” in Hankins (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy*, p. 31. For the history of the term, see Herbert Grundmann, “Literatus-illiteratus: Der Wandel einer Bildungsnorm vom Altertum zum Mittelalter,” *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, 40 (1958), pp. 1–65.

³ See Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators*, where “orators” is used as an ostensibly more historically correct substitute for “humanists.”

⁴ For the origin and meaning of the term “humanist,” as well as problems associated with its use, see Campana, “The Origin of the Word ‘Humanist’”; Kristeller, “Humanism and Scholasticism,” p. 366 (reprinted in *Renaissance Thought and its Sources*, p. 99); Kristeller’s later essay, “The Humanist Movement,” which I have consulted in *Renaissance Thought and its Sources*, pp. 21–32, at 21–23; Giustiniani, “Homo, humanus”; Charlet, “De l’humaniste à l’humanisme”; Celenza, “Humanism and the Classical Tradition.”

alternatives “Latinist” and “orator” have their own problems, the most important being that they are just as likely to cause confusion with alien concepts. A Latinist is someone who studies Latin, not someone who dedicates his life to speaking and writing it, much less who considers it (any longer) to be the essence of civilization. Ditto for “orator,” which conjures up nineteenth-century windbags and misses the fact that many *oratores* never orated. More importantly, though, there are justifications for continuing to use the word “humanist” that derive from the humanists’ own lexicon.

As we have seen, humanists call humanism *studia eloquentiae* and *studia doctrinae* (Cortesi), *studia litterarum* (Piccolomini and Manetti), *bonae litterae* (Biondo and Sabellico), *bonae artes* (Facio, Manetti, Cortesi), *honestissimae artes* (Cortesi), at times even *studia humanitatis*. Taken together these denominations combine notions of study and zeal (*studia*), eloquence (*eloquentia*), learning and knowledge (*doctrina, artes*), literature, language, and culture (*litterae*), beauty and moral excellence (*bonae, honestissimae*), and humanity or human nature (*humanitas*).⁵ This lexical nexus indicates an organic link between the cultural refinement of eloquence and something distinctly human: the striving after the beautiful, learned, correct expression of the human intellect that in its capacity for perfecting the particularly human traits (*humanitas*) of complex thought and language is a consummately moral (i.e., humanizing) activity. If in his highest nature man tends towards what is good (in the broad sense of excellent, morally proper, and beautiful), then the connection between *humanitas* and the obsession with eloquence, achieved through the moral medium of *bonae litterae*, becomes immediately intelligible. If man’s essence is encapsulated in his development of language, as Cicero suggested, then *studia humanitatis* must comprehend the mastery of language necessary to the *orator*’s attainment of eloquence.⁶

Thus, if we keep in mind how the humanists conceived of the tight connection between human nature, language, moral goodness, aesthetic beauty, and culture, we can justifiably continue to use the term “humanism” without fear of slipping back into antiquated and anachronistic associations with vague human values, modern secularism, or humanitarianism.

⁵ Cf. Ernout and Meillet, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine*, pp. 73 (*bonus*), 363 (*littera*), and 658 (*studeo*).

⁶ See Giustiniani, “Homo, humanus,” pp. 168–169. Charlet, “De l’humaniste à l’humanisme,” pp. 29–32, shows that this sense of the word *humanitas* was widely adopted in the Renaissance. Consider, too, that Lorenzo Valla defined man not as a rational animal but as an *animal loquens* (a speaking animal). See Camporeale, *Lorenzo Valla. Umanesimo, riforma e controriforma*, pp. 566–568 (translated in *Christianity, Latinity, and Culture*, pp. 121–123). See also pp. 85–87 above.

Moreover, if *studia humanitatis* is understood not as the “studies of *humanitas*” but rather as the “accumulation of zeal for *humanitas*,” then it is perfectly reasonable to translate *studia humanitatis* as “humanism.” Admittedly, *studia humanitatis* is used sparingly by our authors. Facio employs it consistently. So does Manetti, although his usage is idiosyncratic. It appears once in Cortesi. But in light of the above considerations there seems little reason not to translate, for example, Sabellico’s *bonarum litterarum studiosi* (rendered in Chapter 4 as “devotees of good literature”) as “humanists” or Cortesi’s *studia eloquentiae* as “humanism.” A common word root may be lacking, but the common conceptual root is healthy and clear to be seen if we are willing to scrape away the ideological humus that has accumulated between us and the culture of the Renaissance. Finally, to refer to humanists as “orators” or “Latinists,” even if such words were not conceptual false friends, would merely shift the focus from the final to the material object of humanism, from the *wherefore* to the *what*. For at a basic level all our authors are agreed, and in a way quite commensurate with that argued consistently by Eugenio Garin, that the study of classical Latin language and literature promotes humanity, in the sense of enhancing the essential quality of man *qua* man.⁷ If a certain kind of study of Latin is thought to perfect human beings or move them towards perfection, i.e., to raise the essentially *human* part of them to its highest potential, then the movement dedicated to reviving and entrenching that study can justifiably be called “human-ism,” and those who considered themselves cultivators, saviors, lovers of that humanizing Latin “human-ists.”⁸

The cultural importance of humanism

As this short excursus on language suggests, the essentially literary and rhetorical movement of humanism had a much broader cultural importance for its practitioners than the mere revival of antique aesthetic criteria. Rather it was intimately related to human, cultural, moral, political – in short, civilizational – ideals and flourishing that, according to

⁷ See, e.g., Garin, *Medioevo e rinascimento*, p. 109.

⁸ See similar conclusions about humanism’s humanizing nature in Rico, *El sueño del humanismo*, esp. ch. 3: “Paradigmas”; and Hankins, “Humanism, Scholasticism, and Renaissance Philosophy,” pp. 30–32. Hankins, however, follows Giustiniani and Campana in admonishing that “it is apt to be forgotten by students of the Renaissance that the abstract noun ‘humanism,’ with its cognates in Latin and the modern languages, is not attested for the period of the Renaissance itself, but began to be widely used only in the early nineteenth century.” And thus, in line with Kristeller’s conception of humanism as a cycle of disciplines, he translates *studia humanitatis* not as “humanism” but as “humanities.”

humanists, had been absent during the Middle Ages. With the exception of Piccolomini, who is silent on this issue, all our authors enunciate their own peculiar view of what the humanist restoration of classical Latin meant for their age.

Humanism is first and foremost seen as a force for the cultural renewal of a backward and barbarous Italy. All of our authors agree that the original decline of Latin came at the hands of invading barbarians, and Cortesi and especially Sabellico emphatically portray its return as a triumph of civilization over an intervening period of barbarism. Biondo sees humanism as the backbone of a general cultural renewal in Italy. Cortesi more explicitly views humanism as a modern *translatio studii*, the return of ancient Roman culture and its hallmark, eloquence, from Greece to Italy and ultimately to its traditional residence in Rome. Similarly, Sabellico sees in humanism the final overcoming of the ancient sack of Rome by the Goths in 410. He celebrates the new learning and its libraries (most importantly the Vatican Library) as replacements for what had been destroyed in the fifth century, and the invention of printing as the mechanism for the permanent restoration of ancient civilization.

Giannozzo Manetti seems unconcerned with humanism's possible import for Italian cultural greatness, envisioning it instead as a vehicle for individual moral perfection. Under the stroke of his pen the Three Crowns become paragons of Christian virtue, and the *maledicus* Niccolò Niccoli metamorphoses into the lay image of monastic purity. Even for those not so singularly blessed, the *studia humanitatis* provided the opportunity to pursue the contemplative life of study and solitude. Others shared Manetti's focus on virtue, but they ignored the Christian connotation in favor of a general sense of human excellence. Facio, although nominally admitting the equality of all ages, ultimately concludes that revived eloquence will endow his own with greater deeds and virtue than the preceding one. He further implies that eloquence itself is virtuous, as does Cortesi, who for his part, like Manetti, portrays a life of intellectual study as superior to one of political or military glory. Cortesi and Manetti also concur that true glory is to be won on the field of letters and that a desire for this glory provides the impetus for humanism. Finally, Sabellico attributes to humanism a unique kind of virtue: a renewed sense of *pietas* – not for ancient Roman religion but for its language, which he several times calls a “divine gift.” The barbarians spurned the *munus divinum*, and then the medieval inhabitants of Italy lost the custom of cultivating or worshiping (*cultus*) it; modern Italians have regained this sense of *pietas* and *cultus*, the firm, moral foundations of true culture.

Intellectual and political claims were also made for humanism. Cortesi connects good expression with good thinking, predicating the highest intellectual flourishing on eloquence. Human *ingenium*, so goes his argument, relies on *ars* to reach its full potential. Thus an age without the *ars* of rhetoric, such as that of Dante and Petrarch, will necessarily stunt whatever genius its great individuals have. Humanism's recovery of rhetorical *artificium* opened the way to creative excellence. Sabellico combined intellect and politics, implying (following Valla) that language is power – not military might or the political power of any one city, state, or regime, per se, but rather the power and the fruits of civilization that he and other humanists believed were inherent in Latin. As the symbol and bearer of ancient Roman *imperium*, Latin would restore to modern Italians the status, prestige, and cultural preeminence they enjoyed when they were at the center of the Roman world. Biondo Flavio takes an even more overtly political line. By restoring Latin, the essence of ancient Roman empire, he believes that humanism can lay a firm foundation for Italy's future political fortunes. In his view, the revival of good Latin and other aspects of Roman culture is in the process of revivifying Italy as a valid political and cultural unit, whose coherence derives from its ancient status as the center of the empire. A single ruler of a united Italy is unlikely and perhaps undesirable, but peace, unity, and defense against invasions from northern Europe can be achieved through the revival of a common culture and common sense of identity – both of which, Biondo stresses, are being provided in his day by humanism. To our mind these ideals are frustratingly vague. And in retrospect, considering the *calamità d'Italia* and the cultural tremors sent out by the Reformation, they appear hopelessly naïve. The fragility of humanism's promise would be felt only too well in the aftermath, as Pierio Valeriano's *De litteratorum infelicitate* attests.⁹

Before the unforeseen turmoil wrought by Charles VIII, Martin Luther, and the *Landsknechte*, however, grand visions of humanism's importance naturally led to optimism about the times in general. All our authors agree (with the exception of Piccolomini, who is again silent) that the present is far superior to the Middle Ages and approaches the excellence of antiquity. Petrarch's disgust with his own times is no longer in evidence; his hopes for a grander future seem to be fulfilled.¹⁰ Earlier writers (Biondo, Facio, and

⁹ Cf. Julia Haig Gaisser, *Pierio Valeriano on the Ill Fortune of Learned Men: A Renaissance Humanist and His World* (Ann Arbor, 1999).

¹⁰ For Petrarch's dissatisfaction with medieval culture and hopes for the future, see his *Contra medicum* and *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia* in *Invectives*, ed. and tr. Marsh.

Manetti) are more sanguine about their approximation to ancient greatness, with Manetti even declaring modern superiority in one area: the bequest of a public library. But the sense of distance between the founding deities of eloquence and the modern revival grows over time, likely intensified by greater expertise, knowledge, and experience. Cortesi refuses to call his predecessors *oratores* and only indirectly implies that his own time has achieved that worthy status. Sabellico, for all of his excitement about current advances, stresses again and again the inferiority of the present to the earlier Golden Age. Eloquence might have been restored, but it was not yet flourishing as it once had. All in all, humanists are confident and proud of their own successes, but there is no trace of a *querelle* between ancients and moderns.¹¹ The fifteenth century was more characterized by *cultus* and *imitatio* than by *aemulatio*.

Despite hesitating to claim equality with, much less superiority over, the ancients, the humanists' sense of triumph over the Middle Ages is palpable. According to Biondo Flavio, who cites Leonardo Bruni, the Middle Ages had been a period of "long exile" for "the study of eloquence," which has now returned. Manetti called the age of Guido Cavalcanti "illiterate and uncouth," and Petrarch supposedly "brought [good Latin] back to light out of darkness after it had been nearly defunct for over a thousand years." More ornate flourishes are added by Cortesi and Sabellico. According to the former, the Middle Ages were the "dregs of all time," when the "ornaments of writing were absent" and "eloquence had utterly lost its voice." Humanists freed eloquence from (the prison of) barbarism, woke it from its sleep, saved it from ruin, restored its voice, and returned it to light. Sabellico uses many of the same metaphors and adds a few of his own: freeing eloquence from slavery, washing off its filth, removing it from squalor, and, recognizing it as a divine gift, reinitiating its worship. If humanists had not yet achieved ancient excellence, they had at least overcome barbarism.

Humanism and renaissance

We are accustomed to referring to this period of cultural flourishing as a "renaissance." Yet, except for a few instances in Manetti and Biondo, our authors do not generally conceive of humanism in terms of a metaphorical

¹¹ On the *querelle* as it was manifested in Renaissance humanism, see Robert Black, "Ancients and Moderns in the Renaissance: Rhetoric and History in Accolti's *Dialogue on the Preeminence of Men of his Own Time*," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 43:1 (1982), pp. 3–32.

process of death and rebirth.¹² Instead, as we have just seen, they think of it as a reawakening, a rebuilding, a liberation, a restoration, a rescue, a salvation, a cleansing, an illumination. It would seem, based on these accounts of humanism written in the fifteenth century, that if a linguistic error has been made in the scholarship on humanism, it has not been so much in the terms “humanist” and “humanism” as in the larger concept of “renaissance.”¹³ This notion, which has been applied to humanism since the earliest modern research on the subject – one thinks of Voigt’s *Wiederbelebung*, Burckhardt’s and Symonds’ *Renaissance*, Sabbadini’s *rinascenza* and *risorgimento* (later to become *rinascimento* in imitation of the French *renaissance*)¹⁴ – is a culturally foreign one that has been (unwittingly?) transferred from the realm of art history. Following the elder Pliny, Lorenzo Ghiberti was the first to talk about the “rebirth” (*rinacque*) of the visual and plastic arts in his time, and this concept was popularized especially with Vasari’s *Vite*.¹⁵ As Eugenio Garin pointed out, there is an important difference between the artistic concept of rebirth, which suggests a kind of natural life cycle, an inevitable return, and the humanist’s own notion of *renovatio*: a hard-fought, revolutionary program intended to liberate mankind from medieval darkness with the light of antiquity.¹⁶ That the concept of renaissance has subsequently been applied to humanism is an irony of scholarship and of the popular imagination, which have since come to see the artistic production of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as the central component of culture, whereas in the contemporary worldview artists were doubtless of secondary importance.

Despite increasingly positive attitudes towards the *artes mechanicae*, artists continued to occupy a lower rung on the social and cultural ladder than humanists did.¹⁷ As Peter Burke has written, “the poor humanist, as

¹² In addition to the quotation in the preceding paragraph, Manetti says once that Dante called poetry back to light about nine hundred years “after it had been moribund (*demortuam*) or asleep (*vel sopitam*)” (Manetti, *VD*, 47). Cf. Luke Houghton, “Introduction: *Veteris vestigia flammae*: The ‘Rebirths’ of Antiquity,” in Lee, Péporté, and Schnitker (eds.), *Renaissance? Perceptions of Continuity*, pp. 19–26, at 19–20; Robert Black, “The Donation of Constantine: A New Source for the Concept of the Renaissance,” in Alison Brown (ed.), *Language and Images of Renaissance Italy* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 51–85, esp. 51–53.

¹³ Cf. Ferguson, *Renaissance in Historical Thought*, *passim* and esp. the comments on p. 2.

¹⁴ All from the titles of foundational pieces of scholarship on humanism: Georg Voigt, *Die Wiederbelebung des klassischen Alterthums* (Berlin, 1859); Jacob Burckhardt, *Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien: Ein Versuch* (Basel, 1860); John Addington Symonds, *The Renaissance in Italy* (London, 1875–1886); Remigio Sabbadini, *Storia del ciceronianismo e di altre questioni letterarie nell’età della rinascenza* (Turin, 1885), which on p. 1 also refers to the “periodo del risorgimento.”

¹⁵ See Chapter 3 above, note 192. ¹⁶ Garin, *Rinascite e rivoluzioni*, pp. 3–47, esp. 39–47.

¹⁷ Cf. Lauro Martines, *Power and Imagination: City-States in Renaissance Italy* (New York, 1979), pp. 191–192, 205–207, 244–249.

an educated man, might enjoy a status higher than that of the successful but 'ignorant' artist."¹⁸ The status of artists would only begin to improve in the second half of the fifteenth century, and even in the sixteenth century just a small elite was able to achieve parity with the status of courtiers.¹⁹ Interestingly enough, when efforts were made to raise the status of art from a mechanical to an intellectual activity, they came, as Richard Goldthwaite has pointed out, from the humanists themselves.²⁰ Alberti, for example, consistently strove to enhance the social and intellectual status of fifteenth-century artists, both in his *De re aedificatoria* and in his dedicatory letter to *Della pittura* (to Filippo Brunelleschi). In the latter he praises the accomplishment of "Pippo architecto" in building the dome to Florence's cathedral, and he groups humanists with artists as "intellecti."²¹ Matteo Palmieri also groups visual artists and humanists together in his description of cultural flourishing in his *Vita civile*, as does Cristoforo Landino in the preface to his *Comento sopra la Comedia*.²² The exclusively Florentine provenance of these writings must make us wonder if such efforts made it past the Arno.

However that may be, the realms of the arts and humanism did not in general overlap, and humanists were certain that they, not artists, stood at the forefront of civilization.²³ Indeed, as far as humanists were concerned, they themselves were not part of the cultural *renovatio* of the Quattrocento;

¹⁸ Peter Burke, *Culture and Society in Renaissance Italy, 1420–1540* (London, 1972), pp. 63–71, generally tries to present a positive picture of artists' status, but he notes that the medieval prejudice about artists as mechanical practitioners persisted in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and was sometimes used by humanists to denigrate them. Quotation at p. 70.

¹⁹ Francis Ames-Lewis, *The Intellectual Life of the Early Renaissance Artist* (New Haven, 2000); and Martines, *Power and Imagination*, pp. 244–249.

²⁰ Richard A. Goldthwaite, *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy, 1300–1600* (Baltimore, 1993), pp. 145–146. Martines, *Power and Imagination*, pp. 246–247, denies, however, that humanists had any part in actually raising artists' social status. This resulted, he argues, from artists' increasing social contact with leading citizens.

²¹ Alina Payne, *The Architectural Treatise in the Italian Renaissance: Architectural Invention, Ornament, and Literary Culture* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 75–76, argues that the primary purpose of *De re aedificatoria* was to ennoble architecture and establish it as a legitimate context for intellectual discourse. For the dedication to Brunelleschi, see Leon Battista Alberti, *Della pittura*, ed. Luigi Mallé (Florence, 1950), pp. 53–54, esp. 53: "pictori, sculptori, architecti, musici, geometri, rethorici, auguri et simili nobilissimi et meravigliosi intellecti oggi si truovano rarissimi et pocho da lodarli."

²² See D'Ascia, "Coscienza della Rinascita," pp. 8–13. D'Ascia notes, "La figura di Giotto assume un rilievo fondamentale, paragonabile al ruolo svolto da Leonardo Bruni nella storia della 'rinascita' della prosa Latina" (p. 11). Further evidence for this trend is offered in Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences*, pp. 8–18.

²³ Cf. Charles Hope and Elizabeth McGrath, "Artists and Humanists," in Kraye (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, pp. 161–188, esp. 164: "Most humanists seem to have taken no more interest in the art of antiquity or that of their own time than artists did in humanism." Cf. also Clavuo, "Flavio Biondos *Italia illustrata*," p. 70: "Weder für Biondo noch für die meisten seiner Zeitgenossen zählten Künstler zur gebildeten Elite."

they *were* the *renovatio*.²⁴ In Piccolomini's review of European politics and culture, jurisconsults and humanists are the only men of culture treated, and artists have no place. Biondo's procedure is similar but on a much larger and thus a more impressive scale. Sixty percent of the approximately four hundred famous individuals he names and describes are men of learning, the vast majority humanists (with the second largest bloc composed of jurists), whereas artists and musicians are almost completely ignored.²⁵ Facio, too, gives humanists the lion's share of glory in his *De viris illustribus*. This emerges not only from his organization of material – humanists come first and artists last among men of culture – but from sheer numbers: forty-one humanists are treated and only seven artists.²⁶ Cortesi mentions the visual arts once but only to use them as a less noble foil for the paramount *ars* of historiography,²⁷ and Sabellico does not mention artists at all. It is true that these last two authors are solely concerned with eloquence, but both make a point of emphasizing the excellence of the times, which excellence they attribute purely to humanism, not to the arts. Manetti, who extols the contemplative life of holy *otium*, portrays his paragons of virtue deep in study, thought, and writing, not occupied with the *belle arti*. In fact, he condemns the “money-grubbing arts” of mercantile activity, under which rubric he likely grouped visual and plastic artists, who were craftsmen and either directed or labored in workshops.²⁸

Manetti's peculiar conception of the *studia humanitatis* presents a slightly different view of the relationship between humanism and the period called the Renaissance (and which I, too, shall now return to calling the Renaissance, as is customary, without apology). Like the others he keeps humanism at the center of culture, but he extends it backward into the fourteenth century and has it include the *artes liberales* and vernacular poetry. This accords with the paradigm elaborated by Eugenio Garin, who saw Dante as the hinge between medieval and modern: for Dante eschewed the authority of the medieval *auctoritates*, replacing Aristotle *et alii* with Virgil and the other new humanistic authors, and thus prepared the way for Petrarch.

²⁴ Cf. Hankins, “Humanism in the Vernacular,” p. 14: “Indeed, for him [Bruni], the revival of Latin is more or less synonymous with the whole Renaissance of culture going on around him.”

²⁵ Precisely six artists and two musicians. See Clavuot, “Flavio Biondo's *Italia illustrata*,” pp. 65–70, esp. 65 (and n. 43) and 70 (and nn. 75–78). Clavuot stresses that Biondo's view was shared by his learned contemporaries (p. 65).

²⁶ For Facio's treatment of artists, see Facio, *DVI*, pp. 43–49, and, for an English translation and a superior Latin text, Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators*, pp. 103–109 (English) and 163–168 (Latin). Facio emphasizes the small number of exceptional artists: “de iis paucis pictoribus atque sculptoribus qui hac aetate nostra claruerunt scribere pergamus” (ibid., p. 164).

²⁷ Cortesi, *DHD*, 136.10–137.6.

²⁸ Cf. Martines, *Power and Imagination*, pp. 205–207.

Garin therefore considered Dante a humanist (or pre-humanist) and used “humanism,” much like Manetti, as an umbrella term for the combined thought of the long Renaissance.²⁹ Garin insisted that his view of Dante and of the humanistic continuity between Tre- and Quattrocento only followed that of the humanists, but he cited, significantly, only Florentine authors in support.³⁰ The combined opinion of Piccolomini, Biondo, Facio, Cortesi, and Sabellico suggests that Garin’s argument is yet another example of the dangers of Florentine exceptionalism.

With the centrality of humanism to the culture of the fifteenth century in mind, let us return to the concept of rebirth. Pointing out its marginality to humanism serves a cause greater than mere pedantry. On the one hand, Garin’s observations about the meaning of *renovatio* remind us of humanism’s revolutionary nature, of the humanists’ self-conception as topplers of medieval culture. On the other hand, the metaphors predominantly employed by the humanists highlight the timelessness they sensed in their undertaking, the great sense of continuity that men of eloquence felt with their predecessors – and not only in antiquity. It is true that Cortesi posits a complete lack of eloquence after the barbarian invasions, as does Piccolomini after Gregory the Great. Nevertheless, Sabellico implies that there were eloquent men throughout the Middle Ages (who were, however, not understood by their contemporaries), and Biondo explicitly names two: Bede and Bernard of Clairvaux. If humanism is equivalent with the *studia eloquentiae*, then these men were also humanists in a way, as were

²⁹ See Garin, *Rinascite e rivoluzioni*, ch. 2: “Dante e Petrarca fra antichi e moderni.” The conflation of humanism with all of Renaissance thought was a key point of contention between Garin and Kristeller, the latter considering humanism only one of many intellectual strands in the period. See above, note 19 of the Introduction. Nevertheless, Kristeller also considered Dante a humanist (at least on one occasion). See Paul Oskar Kristeller, “Petrarcas Stellung in der Geschichte der Gelehrsamkeit,” in *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, vol. IV, pp. 27–51, at 28 [reprinted from Klaus W. Hempfer and Enrico Straud (eds.), *Italien und die Romania in Humanismus und Renaissance, Festschrift für Erich Loos* (Wiesbaden, 1983), pp. 102–121]; the passage seems so uncharacteristic of Kristeller that it is worth citing in full: “Was den Humanismus der Renaissance betrifft, so hat man Petrarca lange Zeit als den ersten Humanisten und als den eigentlichen Begründer des Humanismus angesehen. Da es nun aber gerade für einige charakteristische Züge im Lebenswerk Petrarcas Vorläufer gab, wie z.B. Lovato und Mussato, Giovanni del Virgilio und sogar Dante, so mußten diese Vorläufer sich mit dem bescheideneren Titel Prähumanisten oder Protohumanisten begnügen. Ich ziehe es mit Roberto Weiß und anderen vor, sie als Humanisten gelten zu lassen, und Petrarca nicht als den ersten Humanisten anzusehen, sondern als den ersten großen Humanisten, der durch seine Persönlichkeit, seine Autorität und seine Schriften der neuen Bewegung einen stärkeren Impuls und ihre definitive Richtung gab und für ihre große Verbreitung auch außerhalb Italiens weitgehend verantwortlich war.” Consider also Kristeller, “Il Petrarca, l’umanesimo e la scolastica,” *Lettere italiane*, 7 (1955), pp. 367–388, at 368 [cited and quoted in Angelo Mazzocco, “Petrarch: Founder of Renaissance Humanism?,” in Mazzocco (ed.), *Interpretations of Renaissance Humanism*, pp. 215–242, at 220, n. 16].

³⁰ Garin, *Rinascite e rivoluzioni*, pp. 71–73, where he names Landino, Pico, and Bruni.

the great ancient heroes like Cicero, Quintilian, and Livy. The continuity proposed here, it should be pointed out, is different from that posited by R.W. Southern.³¹ In making the case for “medieval humanism,” indeed for a “literary humanism” of the Middle Ages, he defined it not in terms of Latin or literature but in terms of a belief in the essential concepts of human dignity, the natural order of things, the power of reason, and the intelligibility of the universe. None of our authors, however, takes his bearings from these concepts, and thus it is not only an interest in periodizational comprehension that encourages us to restrict the term “humanist” to the Renaissance imitators of the ancient *oratores*. Still, it is essential to realize that the humanists considered their stylistic ideal a timeless pursuit, one open not only to ancients like Cicero and moderns like Bruni but also to medieval authors like Gregory and Bernard. That humanism (broadly construed) had never actually died but had merely fallen asleep or been buried or exiled to Byzantium is central to the humanists’ understanding of their own activity, which consisted not in nourishing something that had been reborn, but in rediscovering, uncovering, illuminating, or waking something that had always been available if one simply looked for it.³² To make recourse for an instant to the initiator of these topoi, Petrarch had called the *medium aevum* “dark,” not “dead.”³³ It needed light, not a necromancer. Thus humanism emerges as a timeless pursuit available, theoretically, to all human beings in all ages. The fact that it flourished in the fifteenth century is therefore, in the minds of humanists, a mark of the superiority of modern Italians, since it is they who recognized the value of what had long been neglected through ignorance or bad taste in the “Dark Ages.”

Languages, ancient and modern

The primacy of classical Latin cannot be questioned. It was the bedrock of humanist identity.

³¹ Cf. R.W. Southern, *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 29–132, esp. 29–32; Southern, *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe*, 2 vols. to date (Oxford, 1995–).

³² It seems worth suggesting that the case was different for the fine arts, whose renaissance began in painting, the classical form of which could not be found even if sought. Thus painting needed to be reborn, through the imitation not of the ancients but of nature. Interestingly, Donatello’s subsequent accomplishments in sculpture and Brunelleschi’s in architecture, whose ancient artifacts were still visible, were often described with the same metaphors used by our authors for humanism, not that of rebirth. Cf. Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences*, pp. 18–21.

³³ Cf. Theodore E. Mommsen, “Petrarch’s Conception of the ‘Dark Ages,’” *Speculum*, 17:2 (1942), pp. 226–242; and Black, “The Donation of Constantine.”

Greek appears as the second language of erudition. Indeed, it was so common that several authors refer to the pair of Latin and Greek as “both languages,” with the understanding that every reader would know what was meant. Greek is portrayed primarily as an ancillary language for the betterment of Latin, especially in the first half of the fifteenth century. In the second half Greek becomes a less significant component of a humanist profile, its noteworthiness diminishing along with its novelty and perceived necessity as a tool for the correct composition of Latin (as in Cortesi). The subordinate status of Greek also emerges from the fact that humanists are not generally said to have spoken it or to have composed anything in it.³⁴ Feats that modern scholars might regard as great accomplishments – Bruni’s description of the Florentine constitution in Greek, Traversari’s and others’ communication with the Greek delegation to the Council of Ferrara/Florence, and Poliziano’s excellent Greek poetry – were not common, nor were they considered worthy of note by our authors.³⁵ Nevertheless, Greek literature seems to have been valued somewhat for its own sake, as can be inferred, at least to some degree, from the fact that Greek studies and translations continue to merit attention after the flag of humanism had been planted on the Ciceronian peak of Latin style. In addition, Manetti reminds us that Petrarch and Boccaccio longed to learn Greek before its usefulness for Latin was appreciated. Indeed, Manetti explicitly attributes their Greek studies to a dissatisfaction with available Latin literature; in search of new books, they turned to Greek. Manetti’s testimony is especially valuable considering that he is the only one of our six authors to have known Greek well.³⁶ The desire to learn Greek was also certainly related to prestige. Nowhere can this be seen better than in Sabellico’s use of Greek orthography in certain Latin words and in his sprinkling of Greek in his own writing, all despite his doubtful knowledge of the language.³⁷ Indeed,

³⁴ An exception is Manetti’s biography of Carlo Marsuppini, in which the latter is complimented for speaking “Greek as fluently, tastefully and impeccably as if he had been born in Athens” (Manetti, *CJEG*, 33: “ut graece facilliter ac prompte, quasi Athenis natus esset, eleganter et congrue loqueretur”).

³⁵ Cf. Grafton and Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities*, p. 119. On Bruni’s work, see Bruni, *Opere letterarie e politiche*, pp. 771–787. On the humanist interpreters at the Council of Florence, see Stinger, *Humanism and the Church Fathers*, ch. 5. For Poliziano’s Greek verse, see Angelo Poliziano, *Prose volgari inedite e poesie latine e greche edite e inedite*, ed. Isidoro del Lungo (Florence, 1867; facsimile reprint = Hildesheim, 1976).

³⁶ The only other to have surely studied Greek was Facio, who is credited with a translation of Arrian’s *Anabasis*. Nevertheless, the translation was not an original work of scholarship but rather a revision of an earlier attempt by Pier Paolo Vergerio. Nor did Facio make great progress despite consuming three years on the project. See Kristeller, “The Humanist Bartolomeo Facio,” p. 275.

³⁷ See Chapter 4 above, note 144.

the prestige of Greek was so great that Sabellico had to pretend to know it well despite believing Latin was the only language that truly mattered. Thus Greek was a hallmark of humanist identity, but, as long as one made the proper motions, one did not actually have to know it to be considered, or to consider oneself, a great humanist. We need look no further than our own authors for proof of that.³⁸

Other ancient languages emerge as marginal to fifteenth-century humanism. Facio records Manetti's knowledge of Hebrew. Manetti reports the same expertise in Marco Lippomano. Sabellico marvels at Pico's Aramaic. These are the only mentions of ancient languages besides Latin and Greek across hundreds of pages of praise for scores of humanists throughout the century.

If Hebrew and Aramaic were considered peripheral by humanists, the vernacular ranked even lower. This conclusion flies in the face of a tradition of scholarship, pioneered by Paul Oskar Kristeller, that emphasizes the double-helical fortunes of vernacular and Latin composition throughout the fifteenth century.³⁹ It is not in doubt that some humanists, including a few of the exemplary humanists highlighted in this study, foremost among them Leonardo Bruni, composed in both Latin and the vernacular.⁴⁰ Yet of our authors only Manetti places the *volgare* within the purview of the *studia humanitatis*, and then with a much greater focus on poetry than on prose. The others either do not mention the vernacular in the context of humanism (Piccolomini, Biondo⁴¹), or they explicitly exclude it as a cultural competitor. Facio laments that humanists cannot participate *qua* humanists in deliberative rhetoric, since it is the bailiwick of the *volgare*. Cortesi and Sabellico even see the vernacular as inhibiting the

³⁸ Cf. Grafton and Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities*, pp. 119–120, who emphasize the marginality of Greek to school and university curricula – a state of affairs that even pertained in Florence at the end of the fifteenth century.

³⁹ His fundamental contributions were: “The Origin and Development of the Language of Italian Prose,” in Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and the Arts: Collected Essays* (Princeton, 1990), pp. 119–141; “The Scholar and His Public in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance,” in Kristeller, *Medieval Aspects of Renaissance Learning: Three Essays*, ed. and tr. Edward P. Mahoney (Durham, NC, 1974), pp. 1–25; and “Latein und Vulgärsprache im Italien des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts,” *Deutsches Dante Jahrbuch*, 59 (1984), pp. 7–35 [English translation = “Latin and Vernacular in Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century Italy,” *Journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association*, 6 (1985), 105–126]. A summary, elaboration, and critical review of Kristeller's work in this area is provided by Mazzocco, “Kristeller and the Italian Vernacular.” See also Mazzocco, *Linguistic Theories*, pp. 82–94; and Garin, *Rinascite e rivoluzioni*, p. 71.

⁴⁰ Cf. McLaughlin, “Humanism and Italian Literature.”

⁴¹ Not only does Biondo omit the vernacular from his account of humanism, but he barely pays it any attention throughout the *Italia illustrata*. See Viti, “Umanesimo letterario,” pp. 717–718. For Biondo's possible support of the vernacular, see the reference to Mazzocco in note 44 below.

development of proper Latin style, since gifted writers like Dante, Petrarch, Leonardo Giustinian, and Cristoforo Landino frittered away their time on vernacular composition rather than contributing more to Latin. These polemics indicate that the place of the vernacular was a disputed question in fifteenth-century humanism, that it enjoyed its greatest support in Florence and Venice, but also that it had far more antagonists than defenders. Even humanists interested in vernacular poetics like Cortesi considered the language less important than Latin. At best – Manetti excepted – our authors present vernacular composition as a parallel activity to humanism that was at heart unrelated to it, like political involvement, the composition of music, or the practice of law.

Contrary conclusions have been reached by Gabriella Albanese in an article on multilingualism in Renaissance humanism.⁴² She argues, on the basis of many of the same texts investigated here, that Italian humanism equally embraced Latin, Greek, and the Italian vernacular as proper vehicles for literature. Her point is not that all were used to the same extent as languages of literary creation, but rather that all were considered valid sources of literary inspiration and acceptable vehicles for composition. Albanese draws a continuous line from Boccaccio (*Genealogia deorum*) through Bruni (*Vite di Dante e del Petrarca*, *Novella di Antioco*) to Biondo Flavio (*Italia illustrata*) and Manetti (*Dialogus in simposio*), to Cristoforo Landino (*Comento sopra la Comedia*) and Paolo Cortesi (*De hominibus doctis*), portraying them all as exponents of trilingualism. Her work is particularly valuable for emphasizing the importance of Manuel Chrysoloras and Greek for humanist Latin, as well as for establishing the high status enjoyed by the vernacular in the thought of Leonardo Bruni.⁴³ Nevertheless, Albanese attributes Bruni's trilingualism to Biondo and Cortesi in a way incompatible with our close reading of their texts.⁴⁴ Furthermore,

⁴² Albanese, "Mehrsprachigkeit."

⁴³ An issue also discussed in Hankins, "Humanism in the Vernacular," and Mazzocco, *Linguistic Theories*, ch. 3. Mazzocco, however, stresses that Bruni only argued for the equality of the vernacular for poetic composition, not for prose writing (because no grammar for vernacular prose had yet been developed), and that Bruni was motivated more by "patriotism" than by a "dispassionate concern for truth" (p. 42).

⁴⁴ Specifically, Albanese assumes without justification that Biondo adopted Bruni's trilingualism along with the latter's periodization of Latin literature and positive assessment of Chrysoloras' importance, despite Biondo's silence about the vernacular in his history of humanism. Consider also that Biondo, in his *De verbis Romanae locutionis*, regarded the vernacular as a corruption of Latin resulting from the barbarian invasions, on which see Mazzocco, *Linguistic Theories*, p. 17. Mazzocco, however, does argue that Biondo believed the vernacular equal to Latin in theory, though he (Biondo) eschewed the Florentine vernacular and hardly ever used his native Romagnolo; see *ibid.*, pp. 46–49. See also note 41 above. As for Cortesi, Albanese ignores his criticism of Dante and his belief in the inherent

she does not consider Piccolomini, Facio, or Sabellico, whose respective silence on and denigration of the vernacular greatly undermine the status it is given by Boccaccio, Bruni, Manetti, and Landino.

Even though we, like Biondo, ought to regard Bruni's testimony as authoritative, in this case his thought does not seem to be representative of the broader phenomenon of fifteenth-century humanism. Indeed, one cannot help but notice that Boccaccio, Bruni, Manetti, and Landino were all associated primarily with Florence, whereas outside Florence there was significantly less sympathy for the vernacular in the humanist milieu.⁴⁵ Apparent exceptions only redound to the rule. In Filippo Maria Visconti's Milan and Ferrante's Naples, two contexts noteworthy for non-Latin production, the humanists commissioned with vernacular works were less enthusiastic than the princes who desired them, at times even daring to smear the hand that fed them with embarrassment and disgust.⁴⁶ As our authors illustrate, only in Florence did the interests of rulers and humanists coincide, sometimes, regarding the vernacular. And as Angelo Mazzocco has shown, for nearly the entire Quattrocento the question of the vernacular's validity as a language of high literature was indissolubly linked to Florentine patriotism and political pretensions.⁴⁷ Since only the Florentine, or Tuscan, vernacular could boast of a distinguished literary heritage and was considered sufficiently mature and developed, only those writers with a vested interest in the Florentine literary tradition explicitly defended, much less promoted, its use.⁴⁸ This state of affairs would only begin to change towards the end of the century in a few cities such as Naples (with Sannazaro) and Ferrara (with Boiardo), and the pan-Italian use of Tuscan would not become standard until Bembo and others definitively established

weakness of the vernacular as a literary language, as well as his description of the entire fourteenth century as "the dregs of all time" and a period in which "eloquence had utterly lost its voice."

⁴⁵ Mazzocco, *Linguistic Theories*, ch. 5, shows that humanists at Leonello d'Este's court in Ferrara contemned the vernacular, as can be seen in Angelo Decembrio's *Politia Literaria* (ca. 1460), and that Guarino of Verona, in his *De lingue latine differentis* (1449), characterized the vernacular as a "linguistic malady that forever corrupts the purity and integrity of the Latin language" (p. 57).

⁴⁶ For Milan, see Massimo Zaggia, "Appunti sulla cultura letteraria in volgare a Milano nell'età di Filippo Maria Visconti," *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*, 170 (1993), pp. 161–219 and 321–382. Of the three humanist translators on whom Zaggia focuses most attention, Antonio da Rho (pp. 194–196) was perhaps amenable to the task of translating classical texts into the vernacular, whereas Pier Candido Decembrio (p. 333) and Francesco Filelfo (p. 357) would have preferred to work exclusively in Latin. Filelfo, however, engaged spiritedly in the composition of original verse in Tuscan (pp. 361–364). For humanist abhorrence of the vernacular in Naples, see Bentley, *Politics and Culture*, pp. 69–71.

⁴⁷ Mazzocco, *Linguistic Theories*, *passim*.

⁴⁸ See, however, Kristeller, "Origin and Development," pp. 134–135, who provides evidence for the use of non-Tuscan vernaculars on the part of fifteenth-century humanists, as well as of the growing use of the Tuscan vernacular outside of Tuscany. Cf. also note 39 above generally.

the worthiness of the vernacular per se in their debates over the *questione della lingua* in the sixteenth century.⁴⁹ Until then, it is no wonder that humanists in other locations, especially Rome and Venice, would view the Tuscan vernacular with suspicion, indeed as a threat to their own proud civic traditions and identity.

Activities

In the view of our authors, participation in the humanist movement consisted in writing, teaching, and, to a lesser extent, speaking classical Latin. Other pursuits are mentioned – such as hunting out, copying, and collecting manuscripts (and later buying books), connoisseurship of ancient art, and participation in learned conversation with patrons or other humanists – but they are secondary and non-essential. An active and especially an original contribution to the revived culture of classical Latin is the touchstone of humanism. Niccolò Niccoli therefore becomes the exception that proves the rule, the one figure consistently treated by our authors who, in spite of never writing anything and refusing even to speak Latin, is grouped with the humanists. Niccoli is saved by his zeal for the humanist project, his towering erudition, his function as a critic, his activity in collecting and copying manuscripts, and his famed library. Nevertheless his stock falls towards the end of the century as the emphasis on original literary production grows.

Writing is the most important activity, but great teachers – especially in the first half of the century, before humanism had spread as far throughout Italy and while Latin was still being cleansed of its impurities – are considered some of the most important and exemplary humanists. Somewhat surprisingly, however, for a movement dedicated to linguistic propriety, speaking is of decidedly secondary importance. According to Piccolomini, Bruni's famed eloquence evaporated when he was forced to speak extemporaneously. Our other authors make no reference to impromptu speeches and only rarely mention conversation in Latin. Even when they use the verb *dicere* it is often with the force of "composition" or "expression" rather than "speaking," and it is sometimes employed as a simple synonym for *scribere*. *Loqui* rarely appears.⁵⁰ Even the formula *ars dicendi* retains little of

⁴⁹ Kristeller, "Origin and Development," pp. 103–105.

⁵⁰ One example is Piccolomini, *DVI*, p. 35.13, in reference to Niccoli's never speaking Latin: "numquam . . . locutus est latine." It is used a second time on the same page (35.10–11) to describe Niccoli's verbal attacks (in the vernacular) on Bruni: "non scribendo, sed loquendo carpebat illum." Another is Cortesi, *DHD*, 144.6–10: "tam diligenter Valla de ratione verborum Latinorum scripserit,

its ancient connection to oratory proper and is here confined to a rhetorical practice that is almost exclusively written. As explained in the excursus on *oratio* in Chapter 1 and emphasized in the discussion in Chapter 3 of the difference between Cortesi's and Cicero's *oratores*, humanism is largely a movement of the written, not the spoken, word.⁵¹ Nonetheless, by writing dialogues that purport to have actually taken place, both Cortesi and Sabellico imply that speaking classical Latin conversationally, in an informal setting, was a standard humanist practice.

Humanist teachers worked either as private tutors or schoolmasters and sometimes as both. Teaching could also be understood in a less formal sense that did not necessitate the exchange of money for services, which seems to be the case with Paolo Cortesi's relationship with Platina or Niccolò Niccoli's with Luigi Marsili. The content of this education can be partially gathered from descriptions in Biondo, Manetti, and Cortesi. All three describe a rhetorical education focusing on the reading and analysis of texts, Latin declamation, and sometimes additional training in Greek.

Teachers are generally recognized as the force behind the spread and development of humanism. Biondo praises them for training an army of humanists throughout Italy. Cortesi attributes good Latin largely to their recovery of the *ars* of rhetoric. Sabellico places humanism's origins in the northern schools of Barzizza, Guarino, and Vittorino, and he regards Lorenzo Valla's teaching as the turning point in early humanism. The teacher *par excellence* is Manuel Chrysoloras, whose students, specifically thanks to his instruction, are generally recognized as the first generation of true humanists. The importance accorded teachers underscores the fact that humanism spread by direct personal contact and was conceived as organized into informal schools, such as those of Chrysoloras, Guarino, Valla, or Leto. But teaching could also take an indirect form. As the example of Valla's *Elegantiae* shows, teaching eventually becomes partly independent of personal contact, relying instead on the written (and then printed) word – a trend that is reinforced by the proliferation of printed commentaries towards the end of the century.

Our authors carefully distinguish between two types of written works: translations (from Greek into Latin) and original compositions. Facio, Cortesi, and Sabellico indicate that translations predominated in humanism's early stages, but, whereas Facio heralds each translation as a triumph,

ipse non bene satis loqui Latine videatur," where it has been translated as "speak" but might actually have the sense of "compose." See above, Chapter 3, p. 148.

⁵¹ See above, pp. 70–72 and 153–154.

the latter two stress the inferiority of translated to original works.⁵² Biondo and Cortesi explain that translations were especially useful as guides to Latin style, but such works lose their cachet for Cortesi as knowledge of good Latin becomes more widespread. This is not indicative of a decline in the actual number of translations, but rather of their diminishing importance for humanist identity over time. They play a conspicuously subordinate role towards the end of the century, as the ability to translate from Greek ceases to be a novelty and as the focus of humanism shifts definitively towards original works of Latin composition.

Of original compositions, prose works were more popular and reached maturity quicker than poetry. Earlier writers speak proudly about a wide variety of Latin genres – histories, letters, dialogues, orations, treatises, style guides, and biographies – but later ones clearly place historiography at the top of the hierarchy. For Sabellico, the new genre of the printed, philological commentary represents a major accomplishment with the potential to establish humanism permanently on the intellectual landscape of Europe. *Oratores* generally outnumber *poetae*, but meter comes into its own in the second half of the century. Facio congratulates Panormita for reviving the elegy, but according to Cortesi it is Giovanni Pontano who truly restored poetry to greatness. In Sabellico's view as well, the writing of good poetry was a characteristic of humanism only after mid-century. Manetti is alone in praising the vernacular poetry of Dante and Petrarch.

Professions

Since Kristeller, Anglophone scholars have tended to categorize humanists as a professional class of teachers, notaries, ambassadors, and secretaries – in short, as rhetoricians.⁵³ Apart from teaching, however, our authors do not portray the professions exercised by humanists as central to their group identity. Piccolomini and Facio provide the most detailed information regarding employment, though such details tend not to occupy the foreground. In their pages humanists appear much as they do in the

⁵² In personal correspondence unrelated to his *De viris illustribus*, Bartolomeo Facio also claims the superiority of original compositions to translations from the Greek. See Kristeller, "The Humanist Bartolomeo Facio," p. 275, who sees behind this comment defensiveness on Facio's part about his poor knowledge of Greek. Such might very well be the case, but it seems safe in light of Cortesi's and Sabellico's statements to take Facio's at face value. The two motives are, at any rate, not mutually exclusive and seem rather to reinforce each other. Cortesi and Sabellico also had limited (if no) knowledge of Greek, but their preference for original composition is clearly linked to the primacy of Latin in their views of humanism.

⁵³ Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and its Sources*, pp. 23–25.

Kristellerian interpretation: as secretaries, chancellors, ambassadors, and teachers. Some are members of religious orders, and Niccoli, relying on family wealth, is the gentleman humanist. Cortesi and Sabellico, on the other hand, give almost no information about the employment of humanists, though one could note that several of the figures they treat are bishops (including two popes).

Ultimately, it seems reasonable to make as much of humanist professions as our authors do. How a humanist earned his living, even if he did so with the Latin of his humanist activity, was at most of secondary importance and perhaps was of no importance at all. Manetti, furthermore, portrays making money as a necessary evil; employment, in his view, inhibits humanism. Certain positions were important, though. For example, Bruni's and Poggio's employment as apostolic secretaries and chancellors of Florence is consistently reported with pride. These were prestige posts, and they lent glory to the whole humanist community. They were not, however, always filled by humanists, nor was sitting on one what made a particular individual important.⁵⁴ Consider Bruni: if he had not been an excellent stylist, he would have mattered as little to other humanists across Italy as did Benedetto and Paolo Fortini, two brothers not noted for their eloquence who acceded to the Florentine chancellorship after Salutati.⁵⁵ Similarly, in the eyes of socially elevated non-humanists – whose regard was another important ingredient in humanists' perception of themselves – what made humanists important was not that they worked as rhetoricians, but that they glowed with the aura of *bonae litterae*. Indeed, without the distinction of that literary *je ne sais quoi*, the relatively humble positions they tended to fill would not have made them worthy to commerce with the city's captains.⁵⁶ Some jobs typical of humanists were so menial that they earned the scorn even of the humanist community, indeed even of the

⁵⁴ Non-humanists held the post of Florentine secretary between Salutati (d. 1406) and Bruni (1410–1411, 1427–1444). See Demetrio Marzi, *La cancelleria della repubblica fiorentina* (Rocca San Casciano, 1910). On the position of apostolic secretary, see Partner, *The Pope's Men*, pp. 15, 79–80, 86–90. Partner calculates that only forty-two percent of secretaries appointed between 1417 and 1487 were “well known for their accomplishment in the humanities” (p. 15), a proportion that diminished after the office became venal under Innocent VIII. He concludes that “literary laymen did not find it easy to get a foothold in the Roman court as papal officials, in spite of the few brilliant careers enjoyed by lay papal secretaries. Competition among humanists for the papal secretary office was ferocious, and some of the most distinguished scholars of the fifteenth century emerged defeated from this struggle” (p. 79). D'Amico, *Renaissance Humanism*, pp. 29–37, provides a more positive portrayal of humanist fortunes in the secretariat, but his findings are based on inferior data and are extrapolated from the state of affairs under two popes who were extremely favorable to humanists.

⁵⁵ For the tenures of the Fortini brothers, see Marzi, *La cancelleria*, pp. 153–187. Bruni served a short stint as chancellor (December 29, 1410 to April 4, 1411) after the death of Benedetto Fortini. He was succeeded immediately by Paolo Fortini. See *ibid.*, pp. 159–160.

⁵⁶ See Martines, *The Social World*, pp. 238–262.

very humanists who worked them. As Robert Black has pointed out, the status of grammar teachers was never high and declined as steadily as it did precipitously during the fifteenth century. Eminent humanist grammarians such as Giovanni Conversini da Ravenna and Pier Paolo Vergerio complained of the *sordidum munus*, the *infestum fedumque negocium*, the *sordida et humilis catedra* of the *grammaticus*.⁵⁷ Does our authors' silence with regard to professions reflect a sense of shame? They certainly would have been relieved to hear Eugenio Garin insist that humanists were not "solo maestri d'eloquenza e grammatici."⁵⁸ However that may be, rather than connecting humanism with a range of professional careers, our authors regard the pursuit of *humanitas* as a vocation in the pure sense of the word. For them, humanism was a life's calling.

When considering the professional context of humanism, it should pique our interest that two groups are conspicuously absent from the accounts studied here: notaries and printers. While the omission of printers is a reminder that the star of Aldus had not yet risen, that of notaries is significant for the way we understand the institutional origins and parameters of humanism. Emphasizing continuities between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Kristeller argued that humanism grew out of the medieval rhetorical tradition of the *ars dictaminis*.⁵⁹ As he writes:

The humanists were not classical scholars who for personal reasons had a craving for eloquence, but, vice versa, they were professional rhetoricians, heirs and successors of the medieval rhetoricians, who developed the belief, then new and modern, that the best way to achieve eloquence was to imitate classical models, and who thus were driven to study the classics and to found classical philology.⁶⁰

Kristeller makes it sound as if professional interests drove humanists to embrace classical eloquence, as if, once having obtained their jobs in chanceries, they then began groping around for a new stylistic register by which to distinguish themselves. Yet our authors, despite the very real fact that humanists often filled the positions once held by the *dictatores*, would shudder at the thought that they had anything in common with those medieval rhetoricians. As far as they were concerned, their movement was born outside of institutional and professional parameters and owed its maturity to the teaching of Chrysoloras and other Italian educators, as well as to the discovery of lost works of ancient literature. Much more in line with the humanists' view of themselves is that of Ronald Witt, who has

⁵⁷ Black, *Humanism and Education*, pp. 31–32. ⁵⁸ Garin, *Medioevo e rinascimento*, p. 5.

⁵⁹ Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and its Sources*, pp. 23–25, 89–90. ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

argued that chanceries, rather than spawning humanism, offered humanists a new venue in the Quattrocento to display the eloquence towards which they had been working outside of institutional parameters for more than a century.⁶¹

Disciplinary boundaries

The scholarly tradition that sees humanists as a professional class also draws a straight line between humanism and a concrete group of disciplines. Kristeller famously defined humanism as “a cultural and educational program which emphasized and developed an important but limited area of studies” that “might be roughly described as literature.” More specifically:

By the first half of the fifteenth century, the *studia humanitatis* came to stand for a clearly defined cycle of scholarly disciplines, namely grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry, and moral philosophy, and the study of each of these subjects was understood to include the reading and interpreting of its standard ancient writers in Latin and, to a lesser extent, in Greek.⁶²

Yet we have seen that, although humanists undoubtedly focused their attention on “literature” that could generally be said to fall into these categories, they did not conceive of humanism as an “educational program” or as a “cycle of scholarly disciplines.” They did see it as a “cultural program,” but less as one devoted to “the reading and interpreting of . . . standard ancient authors” (though this was of obvious importance) than to the creative production of their own new works in a Latin style that imitated those authors. More importantly, although humanists very often read, wrote, and commented on works that could be said to fall into one of the above-named categories, our authors do not show cognizance of being constrained by, or ordered into, these boundaries. Furthermore, considering the privileged status of the term *studia humanitatis* among modern scholars, it is surprising that Giannozzo Manetti, the one author to consistently use it, gathers under it the *artes liberales*, poetry, theology, natural philosophy, and a holy life. What is more, Manetti’s humanist par excellence, Niccolò Niccoli, adheres to no disciplinary boundaries whatsoever but devotes himself simply to Latin literature.

Benjamin Kohl has demonstrated that until the second decade of the Quattrocento the term *studia humanitatis* was merely “a vague way to

⁶¹ Witt, *Footsteps*, summary on pp. 497–498.

⁶² Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and its Sources*, p. 22.

describe cultural and literary accomplishment and especially rhetorical and philological expertise.”⁶³ Thereafter it slowly took on the connotation of an educational program composed of the five disciplines identified by Kristeller, first in northern Italy and then by mid-century throughout the peninsula, but it only assumed that sense exclusively much later, perhaps not even until the sixteenth century. As we have seen, our authors never use *studia humanitatis* in this sense, and it is perhaps on account of its growing association with an institutional cycle of disciplines that Cortesi uses it sparingly and Sabellico not at all as a term for humanism. That is, once *studia humanitatis* gained the meaning Kristeller ascribed to it, it stopped being used by humanists whose intention it was to give a global account of humanism. Instead, these authors talk about *studia eloquentiae* and *latinae linguae reparatio*. When they do use *studia humanitatis*, our authors (except Manetti) intend it in a way commensurate with Kohl’s earlier definition, a similar form of which Aeneas Sylvius once explained in a personal letter: “We use this term to designate the literature in prose and poetry that is typical of the Latin tradition but unknown to most others.”⁶⁴

When disciplinary boundaries are stressed it is in a negative way, not to define what humanism is but to clarify what it is not. This happens most in the works of Facio and Manetti, both earlier writers. Manetti distinguishes humanism from “money-grubbing arts,” including business and law, whereas Facio separates humanism from all traditional university disciplines – natural philosophy, theology, law, and medicine – and also excludes liberal arts like music. Facio’s position is basically in line with James Hankins’ description of humanism as occupying “a middle ground between purely practical studies such as law, medicine, or the mechanical arts on the one hand, and purely theoretical studies such as natural philosophy, advanced logical theory, metaphysics, and theology on the other.”⁶⁵ It was not an all-or-nothing game, though. Facio’s point is not that humanists never engaged in pursuits like theology or natural philosophy, but rather that they took their humanist hats off when doing so. Still, the case of Alberti shows that too great an interest in non-humanistic *studia* might disqualify an individual from membership in the group (when the heuristic task of categorization demanded an absolute decision, at any rate). Thus humanists policed the boundaries around their own field of endeavor

⁶³ Kohl, “The Changing Concept,” p. 194.

⁶⁴ Text in Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, *De Europa*, ed. Adrianus Van Heck (Vatican City, 2001), p. 221: “hoc enim nomine nostri oratorias et poeticas litteras designari, que apud Latinos late patent, apud alios plerumque ignote.”

⁶⁵ Hankins, “Humanism, Scholasticism, and Renaissance Philosophy,” p. 32.

rather conscientiously, but we find none of the nasty polemics against the intellectual and institutional competitors to humanism that characterize, say, Petrarch's *Invectives*. To the extent that humanists' defined themselves against "others," they did so with relatively little rancor, at least when talking to their own community and when not trying to justify or sell humanism to outsiders.

These disciplinary boundaries dissolve somewhat in the second half of the century. Cortesi and Sabellico portray humanists as active in natural philosophy and theology – and in a specifically humanistic way. For Cortesi, Aristotle plays an essential role in recovering the *ars* of rhetoric, and Sabellico extols Ficino and Ermolao Barbaro for bringing humanism to bear on philosophy (including metaphysics), as well as Pico for theology. Cortesi himself wrote a work of theology, basically a Ciceronian translation of Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. Sabellico also praises a few humanists for their devotional literature. Such examples, however, are rarely adduced, so that these pursuits should probably be considered marginal. It is stunning to see that the substantial humanist contribution to theological and philosophical thought, so energetically investigated in modern scholarship, is not recorded by our authors. The *theologia poetica* of Salutati and Pico, the *theologia rhetorica* of Valla, and the *theologia platonica* of Ficino are all equally ignored.⁶⁶ There is nothing about the dignity of man, Neoplatonism, Hermetism, or humanist contributions to the field of logic.⁶⁷ Even moral philosophy, an area of thought in which humanists were heavily engaged, appears only in the titles of a few eloquent works.⁶⁸ For it was form that was at stake, not content. Our authors indicate that humanists pursued philosophy and theology, as humanists, not by the application of any kind of humanist ideas, but rather by the application of classical

⁶⁶ The chief work on humanist theologies is Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*. See also Camporeale, Lorenzo Valla, *Umanesimo e teologia*; Ficino, *Platonic Theology*; and James Hankins and Fabrizio Meroi (eds.), *The Rebirth of Platonic Theology* (Florence, 2013).

⁶⁷ The literature on these topics is immense. See at least Charles B. Schmitt et al. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1988); Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall (eds.), *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man* (Chicago, 1948); Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Concepts of Man and Other Essays* (New York, 1972); Kristeller, *Eight Philosophers*; Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*; Lodi Nauta, *In Defense of Common Sense: Lorenzo Valla's Humanist Critique of Scholastic Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass., 2012); Lorenzo Valla, *Dialectical Disputations*, ed. and tr. Brian P. Copenhaver and Lodi Nauta, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 2012); Claudio Moreschini, *Hermes Christianus: The Intermingling of Hermetic Piety and Christian Thought*, tr. Patrick Baker (Turnhout, 2011).

⁶⁸ See the overview by Paul Oskar Kristeller, "Humanism and Moral Philosophy," in Rabil (ed.), *Renaissance Humanism*, vol. III, pp. 271–309; and for a recent contribution, Timothy Kircher, *Living Well in Renaissance Italy: The Virtues of Humanism and the Irony of Leon Battista Alberti* (Tempe, 2012).

canons of style to the Latin in which they wrote. Perhaps this is why law and medicine, in contrast, are consistently portrayed as incommensurate with humanism. No proof having been provided that they could be engaged in eloquently, they were perceived, like the vernacular, as competitors to humanism – in terms of time, audience, and prestige.

Patronage

Bartolomeo Facio, Giannozzo Manetti, and Paolo Cortesi give the impression that humanism would not have been possible without patronage. Their writings encourage a tentative distinction between four different but overlapping kinds. One is nearly indistinguishable from simple employment and takes the form of powerful persons (or cities) specifically choosing humanists as secretaries, chancellors, tutors, or courtiers – all posts that could also be filled by non-humanists. A second is the commissioning of special humanist projects like translations from Greek or histories of cities or princes. A third uses not money but rather honor to encourage humanist activity, like Sigismund's crowning of poets laureate. A fourth regards not individual humanists but rather the underwriting of resources useful to many, such as Florence's hiring of Chrysoloras to teach Greek in the city, or the founding, funding, or stocking of public libraries.

The great patrons of humanism turn out, unsurprisingly, to be Cosimo de' Medici, Nicholas V, and Alfonso of Aragon. Cortesi adds Piero and Lorenzo de' Medici for a later era, but he provides no details of their largesse. Cosimo, Nicholas, and Alfonso are all praised for financing the efforts of individual humanists and for their founding and support of libraries. Facio specifically describes how Nicholas provided salaries for Greek translators and subsidized voyages to the East in search of Greek codices. Cosimo and Alfonso are consistently remembered for keeping company with humanists as well as for their own great learning.

Cortesi and Facio generally take the patron's point of view in their praise, which is aimed at garnering new patronage for themselves and others, but Manetti gives insight into how humanists themselves perceived patronage. According to him, it was the assistance of princes that allowed Petrarch to enjoy his life of literary *otium* and thus to write so many great works. He criticizes Boccaccio for refusing to become a courtier and thereby condemning himself to a life of poverty; or rather, he criticizes Boccaccio for complaining of his poverty, since that poverty was the direct result of his unwillingness to serve. Cortesi concurs that the best thing a humanist can do is to find a patron who will support his writing. Neither seriously

acknowledges the loss of freedom, lamented by Boccaccio, entailed by turning oneself into another's retainer.

Even more reticent is Sabellico, who says nothing about patronage, and Biondo and Aeneas Sylvius drop only a few hints.⁶⁹ Yet all three benefited so much from patrons. Piccolomini spent his life in the service of cardinals, popes, and the emperor before becoming pope himself. Biondo's career took off thanks to Eugenius IV. Sabellico was Venice's *de facto* official historiographer in addition to being one of its two publicly funded humanist teachers. The role of patronage emerges in the very fact of Biondo's dedication to Nicholas V and Sabellico's to Marco Morosini, but neither author (and this is especially arresting in the case of Biondo) provides specific details about his dedicatee's underwriting of humanism.⁷⁰

Should we expect otherwise? Patronage was a class-five rapid of social negotiation that permitted the client no straight run to communicating his status, needs, dissatisfaction, even his gratitude.⁷¹ A gentleman like Niccoli might (for a stretch) portage around the whitewater of dependency, angst, and psychological violence, but most *poetae* and *oratores* had to get wet in order to get moving, in order, in the words of Christopher Celenza, "to engage in the . . . art of Renaissance humanism and not go broke in the bargain."⁷² Even when blessed with success, clientage was unavoidably and enduringly humiliating – especially when the client considered himself the intellectual equal, if not the superior, of his patron. This was the case for Biondo Flavio, who certainly thought he knew better than Nicholas V, the pope who dismissed him from the curia. As for Piccolomini, he had escaped his house-poor youth by serving men of eminent power; now, having risen to the rank of bishop and perhaps already dreaming of the tiara, there was no reason to remind his readers, even obliquely, that he had once been the creature of other men's fortunes. Thus the incomplete picture of patronage

⁶⁹ In his *De Europa*, however, written in 1458, Aeneas Sylvius does praise Nicholas' patronage of humanism. See Piccolomini, *De Europa*, p. 243: "adeo enim ingenia excitavit fovitque Nicolaus, ut vix evum inveniri possit, in quo magis humanitatis et eloquentie ceterarumque bonarum artium studia quam suo flourerint." Biondo does not mention patronage in his history of humanism, but he does praise humanist patrons at various points in his work; see note 73 below.

⁷⁰ Biondo only describes Nicholas' building projects, not his patronage of humanists – an omission that is likely explained by Biondo's resentment for having been expelled by Nicholas from the curia. See Hay, "Flavio Biondo and the Middle Ages," p. 101.

⁷¹ Cf. Robin, *Filelfo in Milan*, esp. pp. 3–55; Lauro Martines, *Strong Words: Writing and Social Strain in the Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore, 2001), pp. 13–36; Dale Kent, *Cosimo de' Medici and the Florentine Renaissance: The Patron's Oeuvre* (New Haven, 2000); Ronald Weissman, "Taking Patronage Seriously: Mediterranean Values and Renaissance Society," in F.W. Kent, Patricia Simons, and J.C. Eade (eds.), *Patronage, Art, and Society in Renaissance Italy* (Canberra, 1987), pp. 25–45.

⁷² Celenza, *The Lost Italian Renaissance*, p. 121.

we find, even from flatterers, should not be surprising. That our authors say little or nothing about Eugenius IV, for the employment of humanists in his curia, or about Federigo da Montefeltro, for his library, or about the Este in Ferrara, the Gonzaga in Mantua, and the Visconti and Sforza in Milan, is most likely an indication of how difficult – practically and psychologically – communication about the indispensable institution of patronage could be.⁷³

Virtue and the contemplative life

The same authors who emphasize the importance of patronage also give virtue a place in humanism. Facio equates eloquence itself with virtue, as does Cortesi, who, echoing the humanist educational treatises, situates virtue in the reading of classical authors, in the very study necessary for achieving eloquence. Hence his description of Guarino's school, whose purely rhetorical education is portrayed as a foil to traditional titles to honor and glory such as battlefield heroism or noble lineage: it is the home of the *honestissimae artes*, *honestissimae* connoting honor, nobility, and virtue. Similarly, moral excellence and human flourishing are connoted in the very terms *bonae artes* and *studia humanitatis*, and they are integral to the visions of cultural grandeur associated by our authors with the humanist mission. Manetti sees things differently. He locates virtue not in any particular curriculum but in the teacher himself, from whom it flows to the student through close personal contact and the desire of the latter to imitate the former. Furthermore, Manetti equates humanist virtue with specifically Christian ideals and virtuous behavior, especially self-abnegation. According to him, Petrarch and Boccaccio were chaste despite the impression given by their amorous writings, and Petrarch engaged in fasting and divine contemplation. Niccoli, furthermore, pursued a near monastic asceticism: "He remained poor, unknown and celibate, entirely free of all worldly cares, living happily with his books in the greatest quiet and tranquility."

⁷³ Facio notes in his *De viris illustribus* that three individuals were employed by Eugenius – George of Trebizond, Aeneas Sylvius, and Tommaso Parentucelli (later Nicholas V) – but the pontiff does not receive a biography of his own (this is perhaps unsurprising considering the strained relationship between Eugenius and Alfonso, the work's patron). Biondo, though he does not treat these individuals' or families' patronage in his discrete history of humanism, does mention the contribution of the Este (Biondo, *II*, vi.74) and, more generically, the Visconti (*Biondo Flavio's Italia Illustrata*, vol. I, p. 135). As for the Gonzaga, Biondo mentions their humanistic learning but not their patronage of humanism – not even their support of Vittorino, except obliquely by reporting that Francesco I employed him as a tutor to his sons (see *Biondo Flavio's Italia Illustrata*, vol. I, p. 109).

If Manetti conceived of humanism as a secular version of the monastic ideal, retaining much of the form and the content of Christian asceticism, the other authors evince a more purely secular outlook. Their predilection is for pagan writings, their stylistic ideal embodied by pre-Christian writers. None of them senses a dissonance between the love of Cicero and religious orthodoxy, though, an issue on which Manetti consumed a fair amount of ink. Without compunction they called each other *oratores*, thereby co-opting an identity for themselves that was emphatically secular, pre-Christian. In medieval parlance *oratores* were clergy, or those who pray.⁷⁴ By availing themselves of the term *orator*, humanists divested it of its spiritual connotation and infused it instead with a purely classical meaning. Yet for all the secular elements of their identity, our authors manifest no evidence of secularization, of the desire to subvert ecclesiastical hierarchy, the clergy, and religious values that Riccardo Fubini associates with humanism.⁷⁵ If there is anything subversive or irreligious in their secular outlook, our authors do not seem to be aware of it.

Nor do they betray a civic consciousness, a commitment to bringing their studies to bear on the cities in which they operated or on a salutary tradition of political thought. As we have seen consistently throughout this study, the notion of civic humanism, either in Hans Baron's original formulation or in the republican modifications suggested by J.G.A. Pocock, Quentin Skinner, and other historians of political thought, is foreign to the humanists' sense of themselves and their project.⁷⁶ If humanists did at times write works charged with a political message (e.g., Leonardo Bruni's funeral oration for Nanni Strozzi) or were themselves active in politics, it is not for these things that they are praised but rather for the eloquence they brought to their task.⁷⁷ Much like Sabellico's description of humanist engagement with philosophy, it was form, not doctrine, that mattered. That humanists often worked in the interests of political power, both civic and princely, and that they shared responsibility for developing several different political discourses, some of them republican, is indisputable.

⁷⁴ See Georges Duby, *Les trois ordres ou l'imaginaire du féodalisme* (Paris, 1978).

⁷⁵ Fubini, *Umanesimo e secolarizzazione*.

⁷⁶ Cf. Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*; Hankins (ed.), *Renaissance Civic Humanism*, esp. Hankins' "Introduction" (pp. 1–29) and William J. Connell's essay, "The Republican Idea" (pp. 14–29); Jurdjevic, "Hedgehogs and Foxes," pp. 252–260.

⁷⁷ See James Hankins, "Rhetoric, History, and Ideology: The Civic Panegyrics of Leonardo Bruni," in Hankins (ed.), *Renaissance Civic Humanism*, pp. 143–178. It should be noted that Bruni was politically active towards the end of his career, when he held several important magistracies in addition to the chancellorship, which was itself, however, not a political office.

But such activity does not seem to bear on their identity as humanists within the larger humanist community.

When our authors do speak about active engagement in political or commercial affairs, they show a clear preference for the *vita contemplativa*. As the description of Niccoli indicates, Manetti viewed the contemplative life as most suitable to humanist virtue. He depicts Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Niccoli as seeking the solitude and *otium* necessary for a life devoted to study and writing. Accordingly they rejected the professions in law and commerce which their fathers thrust upon them. Only Dante chose to lead an active life of political involvement, and Manetti is at a loss to explain his literary accomplishments in spite of it. Cortesi advises against political involvement, and he criticizes humanists who attempt to mix letters with politics, a life of study with one of intrigue. Thus both men stress the role of patronage, without which, they imply, the *vita contemplativa* would be all but impossible for most humanists.

These overtures to virtue and the contemplative life, however, find no echo in the works of Aeneas Sylvius or Biondo. What is more, Sabellico portrays humanism as flourishing in a civic context where many of its foremost participants are patricians whose central occupation is with affairs of state. One of Sabellico's interlocutors, Battista Guarini, is admittedly a courtier of the Este in Ferrara, but it is in Venice's atmosphere of the free exchange of goods and ideas that he airs his views publicly. This is the context, according to Sabellico, in which humanism will flourish in the future. Furthermore, the other speaking characters in the dialogue include teachers at the San Marco School (Brugnoli and Sabellico) and a chancellor of Verona (Giuliari) – hardly representatives of a withdrawn *vita contemplativa*.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, we should be wary lest we think Sabellico encourages an active life for humanists or portrays any kind of civic humanism. His dialogue's disputation is significantly set *outside* the ducal palace, when the participants and audience are at leisure, and its content is literary, not political or civic or even moral. Finally, very few of the humanists treated in *De latinae linguae reparatione* were active politically, and those who were (like Francesco Barbaro) are not praised in this respect.

Geography, nationality, and patriotism

Our authors consistently present humanism as a pan-Italian movement. Only Manetti focuses largely on one city (Florence), whereas the rest give

⁷⁸ On the individuals who appear in Sabellico's dialogue, see Sabellico, *DLLR*, pp. 13–15 and below, p. 290 (Appendix).

broad coverage, treating many humanists in Lombardy, the Po valley, the Romagna, Rome, Naples, Tuscany, and other regions. No author mentions humanistic activity south of Naples, although a few humanists from Sicily figure into their accounts. The major centers within Italy, as could be expected, are Florence, Naples, Rome, and Venice, but their relative importance shifts according to the author and the date of composition of each source. Earlier writers tend to put Florence in relief, whereas in the second half of the century Rome and Venice are depicted as leaders of the movement. These foci partially reflect the facts of the matter, partially the civic and geographical affiliations of the writers. Local allegiances can be seen most clearly with regard to Florence, both in Manetti's apology for the Three Crowns and in efforts to downplay Florence's role in humanism. Florence is marginalized less by Sabellico, who still praises certain members of Lorenzo de' Medici's circle despite his criticism of Landino and his general emphasis on the North. But there is a clear polemic in Cortesi, who effects a kind of *damnatio memoriae* of Florentine humanism. In their attempts to vie with Florence for preeminence, these exponents of Roman and Venetian humanism admit Florence's great past in figures like Bruni and Poggio only to then claim that the baton has been passed – in Cortesi's case to Roman Ciceronianism, in Sabellico's to Venetian philology and printing. One way to avenge the Florentine exceptionalism so often commented upon in this study is to realize that Florence, while retaining its status as a cradle of humanism, was perceived as increasingly isolated from developments in the rest of the peninsula as the century moved forward.

The peninsula establishes the geographical perimeter of humanism. Manetti is alone in locating humanism, in line with his peculiar vision of the *studia humanitatis*, in France as well as in Italy. When he speaks specifically about the revival of Latin, however, he does so in the context of Italy and especially of Florence (and to a lesser extent Venice). Humanism's *italianità*, moreover, is reflected in the nationality of its participants. Nearly all the *virii illustres* treated by our authors are Italian, the only exceptions being a handful of Byzantine émigrés, the Hungarian Janus Pannonius, and the Dalmatian Coriolano Cippico. Piccolomini, despite taking a broad European perspective in his *De viris illustribus*, counts only Italians and Manuel Chrysoloras among the humanists. Facio includes two northerners (Jan van Eyck and Rogier van der Weyden) among the artists in his collection, but none among the humanists. For Biondo, humanism is at the core of modern Italian identity and is perhaps the one thing beyond natural geographical boundaries that makes Italy a coherent unit. Identity

turns to jealousy in Paolo Cortesi's *De hominibus doctis*, where the praise of Janus sets the stage for the jingoistic defense of humanism's Italian nature. According to Cortesi's Alessandro, "barbarians" are "less receptive to the Muses." It is in all likelihood this association between humanism, ancient Roman history, and modern Italian cultural pretensions that explains the absence of transalpine figures – even of individuals highly regarded both in their own time and by modern scholars, such as Nicholas Cusanus, Konrad Celtis, or Rudolf Agricola.⁷⁹ One wonders if it is also the reason why the efforts of Italian humanists outside Italy are barely recorded.

Byzantine émigrés occupy a middle ground between Italians and transalpine Europeans. Although they obviously do not belong to the former, they are nevertheless not excluded like the latter and are instead treated as full participants in humanism. This might have to do with the fact that, especially after 1453, Greek scholars settled permanently in Italy, some of them arriving as refugees. But it must also be related to the Byzantines' usefulness to humanism as teachers. Unlike Janus, for example, Chrysoloras came to instruct the Italians, not to learn from them. Of all our authors, only Sabellico passes over humanism's debt to Chrysoloras and minimizes the importance of other teachers like George of Trebizond or Argyropoulos. In general, Byzantines are seen as playing a foundational and formative role in this otherwise Italian movement.

Community, honor, and distinction

The restriction of humanism to Italians and Byzantine émigrés is a testament to the exclusivity of the *res publica litterarum* in fifteenth-century Italy and to the strict patrolling of its borders. Christopher Celenza has encouraged us to think of humanism not as an ideological movement or a professional class but rather as a tight-knit community of individuals publicly striving for distinction in the realm of language and literature, a community ordered by codes of behavior and relatively strict guidelines for

⁷⁹ For Cusanus, see Christopher M. Bellitto, Thomas M. Izbicki, and Gerald Christianson (eds.), *Nicholas of Cusa: A Guide to a Renaissance Man* (New York, 2004). For Celtis, see Lewis Spitz, *Konrad Celtis, the German Arch-Humanist* (Cambridge, Mass., 1957); and Jörg Robert, "Celtis, Konrad," in Franz Josef Worstbrock (ed.), *Deutscher Humanismus, 1480–1520. Verfasserlexicon* (Berlin, 2005–), vol. I, coll. 375–427. For Agricola, see Peter Mack, *Renaissance Argument: Valla and Agricola in the Traditions of Rhetoric and Dialectic* (Leiden, 1993), ch. 6; and Albert Schirrmeyer, "Agricola Iunior, Rudolf," in Worstbrock (ed.), *Deutscher Humanismus, 1480–1520. Verfasserlexicon*, vol. I, coll. 10–23. The exclusion of Agricola is all the more striking considering that he was acquainted with Battista Guarini, the second main speaker in Sabellico's *De latinae linguae reparatione*. Cf. Hirschi, *The Origins of Nationalism*, pp. 142–152, esp. 142–143.

who was in and who was out.⁸⁰ As he has shown in his studies of the curial milieu of mid-fifteenth-century Rome, humanists were concerned primarily with honor, that is with their reputations as men of letters, and this concern manifested itself not only in honorable behavior but also in constant competition, bitter fights, and nasty, public polemic. Considered in this light, the sources discussed in this study are honor rolls of humanism, *fasti* of the consuls of humanist distinction.

The concern for honor is palpable on every page of each source. Indeed, honor is tabulated, the reasons for a given humanist's status clearly itemized: so many works, of such a nature, of such a quality, that earned so much respect from contemporaries and posterity. Cortesi and Sabellico both explicitly state that they will only discuss the contributions of humanists who have earned a reputation for their contribution to Latin in the form of writing or teaching. Facio and Cortesi are obsessed with the glory that can be won from literature. Sabellico even describes the quest for literary distinction that drove the humanists on:

when they saw that the earlier style of writing was being widely scorned, and that those who did not say everything accurately and with care were taken for barbarians, each one decided that he, too, would produce nothing except what was correct and well thought-out.⁸¹

Not everything was permitted in the humanist competition for distinction, however. For example, certain rules of sociability applied. This is somewhat surprising considering the vile nature of so much humanist invective. Yet Niccolò Niccoli and Lorenzo Valla – eminent humanists who behaved very badly – are consistently censured. Cortesi also criticizes humanists who took their competition beyond the proper arena of discourse, turning it, he says, “to injury.” Remarkably, these standards of decency are also upheld by the authors themselves in their portrayal of the humanists. Although in a god-like position to rain down terror on their stylistic foes, they demonstrate restraint. Even Facio, who made his own reputation by trying to ruin Valla's, treats his adversary with dignity in his *De viris illustribus*. More than just behavior was at stake. Paolo Cortesi enunciates rules of engagement for the humanist glory game that prescribe modes of production and standards for judgment. Humanists should shun active participation in politics or civic life, specializing instead in literature. There, too, they must specialize, choosing poetry or prose if they hope to achieve glory in either one. In

⁸⁰ See Celenza, *The Lost Italian Renaissance*, pp. 115–133; and Celenza, *Renaissance Humanism and the Papal Curia*, pp. 151–161, esp. pars. 11–13.

⁸¹ See Chapter 4, note 88.

the best case humanists find a prince to pay the bills, but, as his discussion of Filelfo shows, there is a fine line between loyal servants and hired pens. Finally, the humanist community itself must be the judge of quality within its lettered walls. The vulgar mob must be excluded.

The pantheon of humanism

By singling out the great heroes of the movement, by holding up their deeds for admiration, imitation, and emulation, our authors construct a pantheon of humanism.⁸² In Cortesi's parlance, these are the *homines docti* "whose efforts opened the way to eloquence" and "who have done the most to achieve some praise for [it]."⁸³ For Sabellico, they are the ones "who in modern times have aided the Latin language," the ones "on account of whom we have ceased speaking so clumsily."⁸⁴ These are the founders, the carriers, the champions, the core group to which those who considered themselves humanists felt they belonged. They represent the tradition and shared history which aspirants were determined to carry forward.⁸⁵

Certain exemplary figures are perched at the top of the pantheon. Leonardo Bruni was without a doubt perceived as the most important humanist of the first half of the fifteenth century. He is generally acknowledged to be the *princeps* of his age, the first one to approximate Ciceronian style. His massive corpus of translations, his many works of historiography, and his fame as apostolic secretary and chancellor of Florence made him an authority on humanism and a model for others. Even a more critical later age could not disavow his accomplishments. Similarly, Poggio's status as an orator and especially as a manuscript-hunter earned him enduring fame. Among teachers, the pair of Guarino Veronese and Vittorino da Feltre stands out (although Guarino is sometimes considered the greater man). They educated the humanists in Greek and Latin who went on to diffuse the new learning throughout Italy. The founder of the whole tradition, in the opinion of the majority of our authors, is Manuel Chrysoloras, who reinstituted the teaching of Greek in Italy and thereby provided humanists with the necessary sensitivity to classical canons of style.⁸⁶ It is Chrysoloras

⁸² Cf. Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, pp. 104–105 (towards the end of the section "Glory" in Part Two: "The Development of the Individual").

⁸³ See Chapter 3, notes 20 and 21. ⁸⁴ See Chapter 4, note 19.

⁸⁵ This group is assembled in the Appendix, which lists all the humanists treated by our various authors.

⁸⁶ Cf. Vincenzo Fera, "La leggenda di Crisolora," in Maisano and Rollo (eds.), *Manuele Crisolora e il ritorno del greco in Occidente*, pp. 11–18, esp. 15–16. For a different view of where exactly to place Chrysoloras in the genealogy of humanism, see Mazzocco, "Petarch: Founder of Renaissance Humanism?," pp. 228–229, 237.

who enabled the humanists to move beyond the classicizing Latin of their predecessors and simply to write classical (especially Ciceronian) Latin.⁸⁷

One level below these Olympians of humanism hover two individuals whose importance proves a matter of controversy. One is Niccolò Niccoli, whom Piccolomini, Facio, and especially Manetti considered an outstanding humanist. In addition to his prodigious erudition in Latin and activity hunting out and copying manuscripts (and virtuous life, in Manetti's account), Niccoli's glory lay in his donation of his book collection for the creation of a public library. To a later age, however, his humanist credentials were suspect. Cortesi calls him a friend of humanists, not a man of eloquence, and Sabellico ignores him entirely.⁸⁸ The other controversial figure is Lorenzo Valla. Biondo mentions that his *Elegantiae* spread standards of humanist Latin throughout Italy. Cortesi praises him as a teacher but criticizes his style and also depicts him as "annoying and abusive." For Sabellico, however, Valla represents the great turning point in early humanism, the first person to recover truly classical Latin and to effect its acceptance as a new norm throughout Italy.

Finally, a few other humanists stand out who, however, are depicted by only one author as playing a central role in humanism's development. Giovanni Malpaghini da Ravenna comes to the fore in Biondo's account as the intermediary between Petrarch and the generation of Bruni, as the teacher who passed on Petrarch's longing for classical Latin to the individuals who would ultimately satisfy it. In Sabellico's dialogue, Gasparino Barzizza is portrayed as the first to "cast his glance on the shadow of ancient eloquence" and as the fountainhead of the tradition of humanist teaching. When considering a later stage of humanism's evolution, Sabellico identifies Domizio Calderini as the first great philological commentator, thus putting him at the head of a literary tradition with the potential to re-establish ancient eloquence permanently; his heir is Poliziano. As for poetry, Facio highlights Panormita's revival of the elegy. Cortesi, however, maintains that the Muses languished until

⁸⁷ This distinction follows Witt, *Footsteps*, p. 28. Classicizing Latin is Latin written with the intention of imitating classical style but which does not necessarily succeed (though it might). Classical Latin is that which more or less accords with classical canons of style (as understood both by modern classicists and by fifteenth-century humanists).

⁸⁸ Biondo seems to have the same misgivings as Cortesi. He does not include Niccoli in his history of humanism but says of him elsewhere in *Italia illustrata*, "In our day Niccolò Niccoli, although he wrote nothing, was both learned and helpful to many young men in applying themselves to study" (Biondo, *II*, ii.29: "Nicolaus Nicoli aetate nostra, etsi nihil scripsit, doctus tamen fuit et multis adulescentibus ut litteris operam darent opem attulit").

Pontano's reintroduction of metrical and stylistic *varietas*. Regarding prose, Cortesi singles out George of Trebizond and Pomponio Leto as particularly influential teachers. Their instruction was largely responsible for the true recovery of good style, which Cortesi places in Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, Antonio Campano, Theodore Gaza, Platina, and lastly, in himself.

A case apart is Petrarch, although less because of disputes among our authors than on account of his reputation among modern scholars. The latter have long been disposed to consider Petrarch the founder, or father, of humanism, although Ronald Witt has firmly placed him in the third generation after Lovato dei Lovati and Albertino Mussato.⁸⁹ The strength of Witt's argument is, in his own words, that "only when [Petrarch] is seen as a third-generation humanist can his enormous contribution to humanism – indeed, his single-handed rerouting of the movement – be appreciated."⁹⁰ The irony, as we have seen throughout this study, is that fifteenth-century histories of the movement tend to consider Petrarch at best a proto-humanist.⁹¹ Furthermore, their aloofness from Petrarch had nothing to do with his ideas or outlook, but solely with the quality of his Latin. This observation has little bearing on Witt's argument, but it does underline the fact that Quattrocento humanists believed they had completely superseded their Trecento forerunners. Manetti excepted, our authors present Petrarch as a kind of Moses of humanism: he initiated the journey to the promised land of eloquence but was himself destined not to enter in.⁹² Or to put it another way, rather than the father or the grandson of humanism, to fifteenth-century eyes he appeared as a kind of grandfather in his dotage. His child – the notion of classical Latin as an ideal of broad cultural and moral renewal – had to join with the teaching of Manuel Chrysoloras in order to give birth to true humanism, which entailed not merely the yearning for, but the actual achievement of, real eloquence. Nevertheless, there was an influential group within the

⁸⁹ Witt, *Footsteps*, pp. 18–19, claims that before him only Roberto Weiss truly considered Petrarch's forerunners full and not "pre-" humanists. Mazzocco, "Petrarch: Founder of Renaissance Humanism?," pp. 215–221, depicts post-war scholarship on Petrarch's predecessors differently, but he does not engage directly with Witt's arguments. An astounding indication of Petrarch's status in the scholarly and popular imagination is the ca. 32,300 Google hits generated by the string "Petrarch father of humanism" (accessed December 17, 2012).

⁹⁰ Witt, *Footsteps*, p. 21.

⁹¹ For a different view, based on some of the same texts, see Mazzocco, "Petrarch: Founder of Renaissance Humanism?," esp. pp. 221–238.

⁹² To use a metaphor previously employed by Hans Baron: "Moot Problems of Renaissance Interpretation: An Answer to Wallace K. Ferguson," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 19 (1958), pp. 26–34 (cited in Celenza, *The Lost Italian Renaissance*, p. 37 and p. 172, n. 6).

humanist movement according to whom Petrarch was a true humanist. Such men could be found not only in Florence but all over the peninsula. Thus even the authors who dismiss his style most forcefully feel obliged to pay him lip service and to justify his effective exclusion. Theirs is a defensive position, and it gives the impression that they are combating what they consider to be a common but misguided opinion. The most that our authors are generally willing to admit is that Petrarch was a noble forerunner, the first to recognize the value of eloquence but ultimately blind to its true form.

Less indulgence is shown for other fourteenth-century figures. Preceding Petrarch, Dante is called a humanist only by Manetti and is either ignored or criticized by others. Those who come after Petrarch are generally censured, though less for not surpassing him than for not even approaching his achievement. Aside from Manetti's uniquely sympathetic portrayal, Boccaccio is either ignored, disparaged (Cortesi), or mentioned as an afterthought (Sabellico). Biondo considers Giovanni Malpaghini da Ravenna an important founder but one who failed to achieve a proper style, and Cortesi comes to similar conclusions about the other Giovanni (Conversini) da Ravenna. Coluccio Salutati, in part because his proximity to Bruni and the school of Chrysoloras encourages too close a comparison, is treated even worse, his Latin generally condemned.⁹³ Like Petrarch, these figures are mentioned as if by obligation. The impression given by our authors is that, much more than Petrarch, they are wrongly considered humanists by others and the record must be set straight: they should not even be considered forerunners.

The individuals at the top of this pantheon of humanism are not those commonly identified by modern scholars as leaders of the movement, and vice versa. If one had to name the two most prominent figures in Italian humanism, a knee-jerk reaction might be "Petrarch and Valla," or "Pico and Poliziano," but probably not "Chrysoloras and Bruni."⁹⁴ Bruni was

⁹³ Biondo, too, discounts Salutati in the same place he describes Niccoli: "Coluccio Salutati was considered eloquent, though he had been schooled before imitation of Cicero's eloquence began to be known to the young men of his age, and he wrote extensively, though leaving an impression more of good sense and learning than of eloquence" (Biondo, *II*, ii.29: "Colutius vero Salutatus, etsi prius didicerit quam Ciceronianae imitatio eloquentiae sui saeculi adulescentibus nota esse coepisset, et eloquens est habitus et multa scripsit prudentiam magis et doctrinam quam eloquentiam redolentia").

⁹⁴ Consider, to take two emblematic examples, that Garin's *Ritratti di umanisti* depicts the following seven *grandi umanisti*: Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, Paolo Toscanelli, Guarino Veronese, Filippo Beroaldo il Vecchio, Poliziano, Savonarola, and Pico; and that Albert Rabil, Jr.'s edited collection *Renaissance Humanism* contains discrete treatments of only two individual humanists: Petrarch (chs. 4–6) and Valla (ch. 13, where Valla is referred to in the section title as "Italy's Leading Humanist"),

the most widely read contemporary author of the Quattrocento. Yet he has been consistently underestimated in modern scholarship relative to his contemporary popularity, and here we see that that popularity is confirmed by his singular status among leading humanists.⁹⁵ As for Chrysoloras, most scholars would acknowledge his contribution to humanism but would stop short of calling him a proper humanist, on account of either his Greek origin or his poor Latin credentials. But fifteenth-century humanists generally considered him not only one of their own but also the true father of their tradition.⁹⁶

One final observation must be made regarding the pantheon of humanism: it is entirely male. Not one woman appears in these catalogues of illustrious men. That humanism was largely a man's world, and that its leaders considered it a boys' club, should come as no surprise, but this omission is nevertheless important. Scholars have gone to great pains in the last several decades to document the contributions of female humanists.⁹⁷ Furthermore, three women in particular, all from northern Italy (and thus certainly known to Sabellico, if not to Cortesi), had achieved widespread fame by the final decades of the fifteenth century: Laura Cereta, Cassandra Fedele, and Isotta Nogarola.⁹⁸ Margaret King has noted that some "male humanists praised learned women extravagantly" while others reacted to their accomplishment with uncertainty, defensiveness, or hostility.⁹⁹ Our authors, in contrast, simply ignore them. From their point of view, to adapt Kristeller's famous quip about

in addition to which one could add ch. 28: "Quattrocento Humanism and Classical Scholarship," which focuses on Poliziano.

⁹⁵ A point made several times by James Hankins, especially in his *Repertorium Brunianum: A Critical Guide to the Writings of Leonardo Bruni*, vol. I: *Handlist of Manuscripts* (Rome, 1997), pp. xv–xxi. Hankins notes (p. xx) that Valla is the most studied of all humanists despite his very small contemporary audience, whereas Bruni has been largely neglected despite his massive contemporary popularity. What Hankins has concluded based on manuscript survival is fully confirmed in this study of the self-conception of humanism: Bruni was undoubtedly the leading figure of Quattrocento humanism.

⁹⁶ Incidentally, Chrysoloras continued to be seen as the father of philological humanism well into the sixteenth century. The German Hellenist Martin Crusius, for example, in his *Germano-Graeciae libri sex* (Basileae, 1585), made a point of tracing his own scholarly genealogy back to Chrysoloras, by way of Johannes Reuchlin (p. 234). See Walther Ludwig, *Hellas in Deutschland: Darstellungen der Gräzistik im deutschsprachigen Raum aus dem 16. und 17. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1998). I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Ludwig for this reference.

⁹⁷ For example in the series "The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe," edited by Margaret King and Albert Rabil, Jr.

⁹⁸ See Margaret King, "Book-Lined Cells: Women and Humanism in the Early Italian Renaissance," in Rabil (ed.), *Renaissance Humanism*, vol. I, pp. 434–453. The fame of these three women is noted on p. 434, n. 2. Cf. also Grafton and Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities*, pp. 29–57.

⁹⁹ King, "Book-Lined Cells," pp. 441–445 (quotation at 441).

philosophers, women were neither exemplary nor monstrous humanists, but no humanists at all.

Beyond the mirror

The self-conception of Italian humanism reconstructed here resurrects a world of defunct paradigms and discarded clichés. At times humanists even appear as farsighted world-shapers, bearing the light of ancient culture to dispel the decadence of a benighted, stultifying *medium aevum*. Obviously, we must resist the temptation to be transported back to an era of scholarship before the “revolt of the medievalists,” when far too much credence was given to the humanists’ own boasts about their accomplishments.¹⁰⁰ Equally important, however, we must resist the temptation to discount the humanists’ self-conception as alien to reality, as useless for understanding *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*. Although the object we now behold is admittedly no universal truth but a subjective perception, it is nevertheless a perception that lies at the core of humanist identity. And in this sense it is largely coextensive with what humanists *were*, although not necessarily with what they actually *did*. The humanists’ own self-conception reveals which aspects of their activities had the greatest importance to them, thus helping us to understand more reliably what it was that individuals saw in themselves and others that they identified with humanism. Furthermore, the way humanists viewed themselves, their own understanding of their ideals, accounts in large part for the decisions they made, including the decision to join the humanist game rather than some other; it supplies a rationale for humanism.

Needless to say, a mere six authors, no matter how important they may be, can hardly provide a new paradigm for defining humanism. They can, however, indicate a new interpretive direction, one that gives insight into facets of the movement heretofore unstudied, that enters into the humanists’ mental world with categories that they themselves fashioned, enunciated, and cherished rather than with ones immediately meaningful to modern scholars. And in so doing it can lay bare the affective connection to the *studia humanitatis*, or *studia eloquentiae*, that so many humanists forcefully evinced but that so far has eluded historical explanation.

¹⁰⁰ On the “revolt of the medievalists,” see Ferguson, *The Renaissance in Historical Thought*, pp. 329–385; and, for a recent evaluation, William Caferro, *Contesting the Renaissance* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 8–12.

Furthermore, the insights gained from this approach open the way to grasping humanism as a unitary phenomenon from the thirteenth through the fifteenth centuries and beyond, especially when harnessed to Kristeller's combined work on humanism and to Ronald Witt's study of Renaissance literary classicism.¹⁰¹ The stylistic ideal, informed by grand cultural goals and visions, spans from Lovato and the Paduans, through Petrarch, Salutati, Bruni, and Valla (and yes, apparently even Ficino), to Poliziano, Bembo, Erasmus, Melanchthon, and Vives. It makes "Renaissance humanism" more than an umbrella term for "intellectuals" in the era between high scholasticism and science. That this period itself can be broken up into distinct phases and classified according to varying and competing currents (and different notions of what in practice constitutes proper style) does not undermine the enduring constant of classical Latin eloquence as a source of inspiration, as an object of longing, as an expression of excellence. From a broader perspective, the stylistic ideal also connects humanism meaningfully to (while in no way equating it with) other distinct traditions, both later and earlier: to the great age of philology in Leiden (embodied in figures like Scaliger, Heinsius, and Salmasius), to the classicism of Charlemagne's court, and to the very Golden and Silver Ages of Latin. It helps us grasp why humanists thought what they were doing was not something new but rather something ancient, something eternal.

Another benefit to this interpretation is that it explains how individuals oriented in such diverse intellectual and even ideological directions could nevertheless recognize each other as being in the same class. Clearly some humanists tried to educate the ruling elite, others to change the nature of education, some to defend republics, others to praise principalities, some to increase religiosity, others to promote secularization, some to inculcate moral reform, others fundamentally to alter the fabric of society – all seemingly disparate if not mutually exclusive activities. But if one starts from the position that humanists were generally united in their yearning for classical eloquence, then each of these undertakings emerges as a different cultural application of one common endeavor. Thus the worst thing one could say of another humanist was not that he was a republican or a monarchist, a religious or a pagan, but rather that he was a poor stylist.¹⁰² This view also adds a layer of comprehensibility to the enduring success of humanism and its appeal for the ruling classes: on the one hand, humanism was linked to

¹⁰¹ Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and its Sources*; Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and the Arts*; Kristeller, *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*; Witt, *Footsteps*.

¹⁰² Cf. Celenza, *The Lost Italian Renaissance*, pp. 128–130; and Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti*, pp. 50–57.

attractive cultural aspirations and ideals, to moral and intellectual excellence; on the other, it was malleable enough to be fitted to any number of specific aims and contexts.

Finally, this particular mode of understanding humanism may dissolve the haze that has accumulated around humanism's significance since Eugenio Garin and Paul Oskar Kristeller wrought their powerful interpretations, thereby shaping vastly different scholarly traditions. For Garin, humanism constituted a transformational period in human history, a moment of awakening in which a searching dialogue with specific ancient authors attuned Petrarch and his heirs to the true nature of their being. He recognized the importance of Latin, of rhetoric, of eloquence to this enterprise; for this was the mode in which humanists communed with the ancients and with each other, thus bringing "humanity to self-awareness through the relationship established with others in their strenuous effort to reach an ever higher form of life."¹⁰³ Whatever the merits of this understanding of humanism as a meta-argument or in the sense of *Wirkungsgeschichte*, it does not reflect the sense the humanists had of their own enterprise, at least insofar as we have been able to reconstruct it from their own testimony. There are important points of overlap, to be sure, such as an orientation towards antiquity, a dedication to eloquent Latin, and a belief in the revolutionary nature of their program. But their program, from their point of view, was not the one Garin identified. The humanists did not want to construct an ideal city of virtuous citizen-thinkers; they wanted to restore classical Latin eloquence. Garin saw these goals as inextricably linked insofar as Latin was the medium for transmitting a set of ideas and ideals. Therefore he criticized humanists in the late fifteenth and sixteenth century who, as he saw it, "impoverished" *litterae* by turning them into "rhetoric divorced from every concrete value."¹⁰⁴ Yet as we have seen, the humanists assigned primary value not to the content of the literature they sought to imitate but to the form. Indeed, our authors barely talk about *ancient* sources at all. Their focus, rather, is on *modern* works, and even then they hardly mention content. This is the great difference between Garin and the humanists, despite his acute receptiveness to the civilizational significance they ascribed to humanism. This is why Garin could consider Petrarch a humanist on par with Bruni and Poliziano but the majority of Quattrocento humanists could not. For Garin it was Petrarch

¹⁰³ Garin, *Medioevo e rinascimento*, p. 115: "umanità fatta consapevole attraverso il rapporto stabilito con gli altri uomini nell'operoso sforzo di raggiungere una sempre più alta forma di vita" (translation mine).

¹⁰⁴ Garin, *L'umanesimo italiano*, p. 90: "retorica staccata da ogni valore concreto" (translation mine).

who had approached literature and the *studia humanitatis* in the full knowledge of their significance and of the value which an education of the mind through conversation with the great masters of antiquity was bound to have for the whole of mankind. These masters alone had understood the full importance of the soul which was to result from the study of the highest products of the human mind.¹⁰⁵

Maybe so, but humanists after Petrarch seem unaware of this importance. For them the stylistic ideal was not a degeneration of the *studia humanitatis*, not “rhetoric divorced from every concrete value,” but rather a cultural ideal of great magnitude – an ideal that Petrarch, with his bad Latin, did not live up to. Similarly, Garin explained the humanist contempt for scholastic writers thus: “The ‘barbarians’ were not barbarians because they were ignorant of the classics, but because they did not understand them within the truth of their historical situation.”¹⁰⁶ For Biondo, Cortesi, and Sabellico, however, the “barbarians” were barbarians precisely because they could not write classical Latin, not because they failed to grasp the historical Cicero.

Above I adopted Garin’s division between form and content, *verba* and *res*.¹⁰⁷ But to distinguish between the two is to miss the humanists’ point. They believed the form itself had content, a talismanic power to transform the “the dregs of all time” into a budding Golden Age. How exactly was this supposed to happen? I am not sure that we can answer this question, nor am I sure the humanists could have explained it precisely, either. It has more the quality of an assertion than an argument; it is, as they would have said, apodictic, not demonstrative. Cortesi comes closest to providing an explanation with his theory of increasing the potential of *ingenium* through *ars*, but even he does not account for how the leap to civilization should follow. In the *Elegantiae* Valla claimed that all culture stands and falls with language, relating and conflating the *imperium romanum* with the *lingua romana*.¹⁰⁸ Before him Petrarch had equated virtue with knowledge, the knowledge of Rome and its history, rumbling mantically, “for who can doubt that Rome would rise again instantly if she began to know herself?”¹⁰⁹ The idea is that by renewing the essence of Roman antiquity, all the other components of its greatness would return as part of the package. Was it simple good fortune that, as Biondo Flavio reports,

¹⁰⁵ Garin, *Italian Humanism*, p. 19 (Italian original = *L’umanesimo italiano*, p. 26).

¹⁰⁶ Garin, *L’umanesimo italiano*, p. 21 (as translated in Celenza, *The Lost Italian Renaissance*, p. 35).

¹⁰⁷ See Garin, *L’umanesimo italiano*, p. 90. ¹⁰⁸ See Chapter 4, pp. 190, 197–198.

¹⁰⁹ Francesco Petrarca, *Rerum familiarium libri*, vol. I: I–VIII, tr. Aldo S. Bernardo (Albany, 1975), p. 293 (*Ep. fam.*, VI, 2).

the recovery of Ciceronian eloquence coincided with a period of economic flourishing, increasing military strength, sundry decades of relative peace, and apparent stability within Italy? Did the humanists confuse cause and effect, or perhaps correlation with cause? At any rate, they got heady on their own wine, and they metamorphosed into maenads of eloquence.

Kristeller argued that it is wrong to read humanism as a chapter in the history of philosophy or theology, as it was not characterized in the first instance by philosophical tendencies, schools, or positions, nor was it propelled primarily by theological currents; a few humanists made undeniable contributions in these areas, but humanists on the whole were not necessarily deep thinkers. This is no reason, however, to discount humanism as anti-intellectual or anti-philosophical or, as Kristeller did, define it in a thought-vacuum sealed off, as Garin would have said, from every concrete value. For the humanists did have shared ideas, values, and ideals, the most powerful of which was the belief in the transformative power of classical eloquence. It was this ideal that generated humanism's momentum, that made it attractive to others, that sold it to elites, and that convinced generations across centuries, long after humanism itself had perished, that an education in *literae humaniores* was indispensable to a proper and good life. Thus if we feel compelled to read humanism as a chapter in the history of something, then in the history of mentalities or, better, in the history of culture broadly construed (*Kulturgeschichte*). Humanism is the chapter whose protagonists believed, consciously or less so, that participation in the world of eloquent Latin literature had profound civilizational consequences.

What to do, then, with the Kristeller thesis? Its painstaking precision and sober frankness with regard to so many aspects of humanism have made it the sturdiest interpretation, grounded most deeply in palpable facts. Yet none of these facts, in the way they are presented by Kristeller, can explain why anyone wanted to be a humanist, why humanism picked up speed as a movement and achieved such remarkable success. Kristeller famously sought to de-ideologize humanism, to divorce it from both modern ideological concerns and teleological or Whiggish understandings of history. In the process of trying to get to the bottom of "the thing in itself," however, he neglected the ethos of humanism, tending to view humanists' cultural claims as inter-disciplinary bickering or professional jockeying, or simply ignoring them altogether. Yet no cultural movement exists without an object of striving, i.e., the very thing towards which a "move-ment" proceeds. This *telos* may be elusive, seeming to change too often to permit of scientific classification, but to describe a movement in a way that is hermetically sealed off from that striving, however difficult it is to discern,

is necessarily to render it in a radically distorted image. Indeed, the more precise one becomes with regard to all other details the less sense they make, like a painting put under such high magnification that one no longer sees any color but only the microscopic makeup of the pigment – precise and fascinating, but lacking meaning unless one is interested in color production, not the master's hand. There is presumably less intentionality in a cultural movement like humanism than in a museum *Meisterwerk*. But though the former should not be viewed in a naïvely teleological way, neither can the importance of foresight, programming, or aspiration be underestimated.

When Kristeller's image of humanism is focused through the lens our authors provide of the humanists' self-conception, however, the total picture is brought into sharp relief. It makes sense why humanists attached such importance to rhetoric – because this art underpinned eloquent *oratio* more than any other; why they tended to work as secretaries, chancellors, ambassadors, teachers, and tutors – because these occupations provided the best context in which to exercise eloquence, or at least to make a living off the eloquence they had worked so hard to attain; why they tended to avoid sophisticated, systematic debate on theology, metaphysics, cosmology, or logic – because they were primarily interested in eloquence, not the scholastic philosophy of their time; and why they focused on studies and literature that came to be grouped institutionally under the term *studia humanitatis* – because grammar and rhetoric provided the foundation for eloquence, while poetry, history, and moral philosophy were realms perfectly suited to eloquent expression (and certainly much better suited than scholastic philosophy and theology, law, and medicine). Why, finally, the obsession with eloquence? Because, far from being a mere aesthetic concern, it was the portal to past and future greatness, individual perfection, cultural renewal.

Placing humanism on the cultural landscape in this way may even recoup the disciplinary disadvantage that has resulted from the last century's exacting revision and reduction of Burckhardt's romantic thesis, and especially from the equation of humanism with Latin style. As Eckhard Kefler lamented, humanism now seems "a minor concept within the singular discipline of literary history," cut off from the wider historical trends it was once thought to explain.¹¹⁰ As we have seen, humanists who pursued the stylistic ideal did not therefore conceive of themselves as occupying a mere chapter in the history of literature. On the contrary, they thought they

¹¹⁰ Kefler, "Renaissance Humanism: The Rhetorical Turn," p. 182.

were making history itself, reanimating civilization with the high-voltage current of *bonae litterae*. For while the humanists were materially obsessed with rhetoric, Latin, and eloquence, three interests that might seem to us idiosyncratic, specialized, even boring, they also dedicated themselves to the eternal, transcendent goals of cultural rejuvenation, human flourishing, and the good life. Few ideals could be more noble, and few movements that embodied them were as successful or influential as Renaissance humanism.